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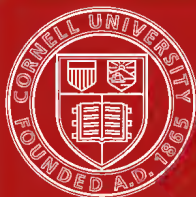
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**THE PROBLEM OF THEOLOGY IN  
MODERN LIFE AND THOUGHT**

“The friends left the church, and looking up from the exterior at the window which they had just been contemplating within, nothing was visible but the merest outline of dusky shapes. Neither the individual likeness of saint, angel, nor Saviour, and far less the combined scheme and purport of the picture, could anywise be made out. That miracle of radiant art, thus viewed, was nothing better than an incomprehensible obscurity, without a gleam of beauty to induce the beholder to attempt unravelling it.

“‘All this,’ thought the sculptor, ‘is a most forcible emblem of the different aspect of religious truth and sacred story, as viewed from the warm interior of belief or from its cold and dreary outside. Christian faith is a grand cathedral with divinely pictured windows. Standing without, you see no glory, nor can possibly imagine any; standing within, every ray of light reveals a harmony of unspeakable splendours.’”

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S

*Transformation*, chap. xxxiii.



# THE PROBLEM OF THEOLOGY IN MODERN LIFE AND THOUGHT

BY

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HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LONDON MCMIX

TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
PRINCIPAL TULLOCH  
THE GREATEST CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGIAN OF HIS TIME  
TO WHOSE INSPIRATION IS OWING ANYTHING  
OF VALUE THESE LECTURES  
MAY CONTAIN

## PREFACE

THE Rev. Alexander Robertson, a probationer of the Free Church of Scotland, who died at Glasgow on August 3, 1899, left the residue of his estate, amounting to £2,500, to the University of Glasgow, for the endowment of a lectureship in defence of the Christian Religion. The lectures contained in this volume were delivered on the Alexander Robertson foundation. The lecturer trusts that the intention of the founder has been carried out. It is, however, a characteristic of modern theology that Apologetics as a separate discipline has practically disappeared. The Christian Religion requires no defence. One may as well talk about defending the sun in the heavens. All that is needed is that it be understood and its central doctrines brought into the line of vision of each successive epoch. "We needs must love the highest when we see it."

The following quatrain by one who knew

Mr. Robertson well may fittingly serve as a tribute to the founder of the lectureship, whose generosity has enabled the writer to give permanent shape to ideas which have long formed the background of his life-work :—

He loved his Church, his college, and his city,  
Yet hope deferred dimmed youth's dear dream of fame;  
Too proud to ask of life for praise or pity,  
He passed—but left a message and his name.

*Mrs. Marion Buchanan.*

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*Synopsis.*—The Christian Religion has a threefold aspect. It is a phenomenon in history, a metaphysical theory of the universe, and a psychical experience. The characteristic of the new philosophy is that it attaches an importance to spiritual experience as a medium of intellectual approach to the Absolute and a criterion of Reality which the historical schools of metaphysics have not hitherto regarded as legitimate. It is scarcely sufficiently recognised that this is simply getting back to the Christian standpoint, and these lectures are an attempt to show that the Christian Church has never made any other claim for Christian doctrine than that it is the metaphysical statement of the implications of Christian experience, and that, therefore, the way out of our present difficulties lies rather in a clearer conception of the function of the Church than in an academic attempt to formulate a creed which can only be a true creed in so far as its relation to the highest activities of modern life is vital and close-fitting.

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ing and sanction. The prevalent idea that it is possible to take over the ethics of the Gospel, and drop the metaphysics which alone make it intelligible, is a mere dream which a consideration, not only of logical processes, but of the most patent facts of history, ought to dispel.

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## INTRODUCTION

THESE lectures come out of the heart of a busy life that has been necessarily devoted to the solution of the practical problems of religion rather than to the consideration of its theological background. But the writer has faced these problems with a metaphysical bias acquired in early youth, and with the ineradicable conviction that theory and practice can never be disjoined. What is right theoretically must work out rightly in practice. And what in practice proves itself to be right must have a metaphysical basis must, be rooted in those supersensuous forces which make the universe a cosmos.

The Christian Religion has to us a threefold aspect. It is a phenomenon in history. It emerged upon the world in time, on a definite spot of the earth's surface, as the culmination of a historical process stretching far back to a dim antiquity. It is subject therefore to

the laws of evidence that govern historical inquiry. The scientific investigator of Christian origins must apply to the recorded incidents the same strict scrutiny as he gives to the pages of Thucydides, Livy, or Tacitus. Historical incidents in themselves can never be a matter of intuition or, in the strict sense, of revelation.

Again, the Christian Religion presents itself to us as a metaphysical system of the universe. It postulates God, not as a creation of the imagination necessary to wreath human life with an aureole of sentiment, but as a spiritual metaphysical Being, not only supremely real but the ground of all Reality. In its leading doctrines it offers a theory of the inner nature of God, of man, and of human destiny which is not simply, like the myths of Plato, an allegory invented to illustrate certain features of human life or to adumbrate probable solutions of life's difficult problems, but a true theory, essentially real—as real as it is possible for the infinite Reality to be apprehended by the finite mind. As metaphysics this theory is subject to the laws of metaphysical reasoning. It must vindicate its rationality to the human intellect. It may have within it unsolved but not insoluble mysteries. The postulate of the metaphysician is that the universe is intelligible.

The moment we acquiesce in the unknowable the agnostic has us on the hip, and alike metaphysician and theologian are banished from the field of practical activities.

Were these two features all that we have in the Christian Religion, then it would be for us simply a subject of curious study. We could approach it with the aloofness with which we interest ourselves in the wars of the Aztecs or the probable inhabitants of Mars. The problems it presents would be as intellectually abstract as the propositions of Euclid.

But there is more. The Christian Religion is a spiritual experience. The historical incidents, recorded in their setting, and the metaphysical Creed which gathers up the essence and meaning of these incidents, stir in the human soul convulsive emotions and rouse dormant energies which transform a man's whole nature and give him a changed outlook upon life's values. I do not like the term "supernatural," because all that comes from God is of the nature of God and must be natural, but if we understand by nature merely the ordinary sequence of events under the action of those forces known to science and with which science is continually dealing, then the appeal of the

Christian Religion when it comes to the soul introduces it into a supernatural world, a spiritual realm, where the soul is touched with new and strange experiences which seem unintelligible to the merely natural man, and which not unfrequently the scientist has considered to be purely pathological. Christianity has had this effect from the beginning, and the marvellous thing is that after nineteen hundred years it has not spent its force, but is to-day as potent an energy in transforming the natural into the spiritual man as it was in the first transports of ecstatic enthusiasm amid which it was born.

Now it is quite evident that this vital fact must change our whole method of approach alike to the historical and the metaphysical aspect of our Christian faith. The history is not now a series of incidents in which we have a mere objective interest, whose credibility in each isolated case must be vindicated to the intellect, and which must one and all conform to those laws of natural development which are the province of science. It belongs to a supernatural process of which we are ourselves a part, and the recorded incidents must be viewed in the light of this process. Criticism still claims the right of adjusting the

facts to the evidence and of separating between the essential and the irrelevant. But the facts are now not facts of yesterday but of to-day, and a line of argument large enough to include both must be adopted. The assigned cause must be adequate to the effect. An inquiry into Christian origins which ignores the whole subsequent history of the Christian Church and the rich spiritual treasures of Christian experience, and investigates the veracity of the Gospel record much in the same way and by the same canons of evidence as a detective would employ in inquiring into an act of petty larceny, can never be very illuminating. The true critic approaches the problem with the absolute knowledge that he is here at a critical period of human evolution, that God is working through these incidents with unusual intensity and precision, and that therefore nothing is impossible or even improbable that is relevant to the main issue.

Now, these lectures do not touch the historical problem, and I merely make this explanation to indicate the bearing they have upon it, and to dissociate my line of argument from that of those writers who treat the historical aspect of Christianity with indifference, so long as the ideal truth, which is of its essence, is retained.

The Abbé Loisy, from the point of view of the Church, seems impatient with historical facts and ready to grasp at the most advanced views of the most advanced critics as scientifically verified truths. To him the Church is the historical repository of spiritual truth, the teacher of spiritual doctrine and the guide to devotional living. Historical records have value only as recording the stage of spiritual evolution which their writers had reached. Sabatier from the philosophic point of view comes to much the same conclusion. But this is to cut off our Christian experience from its root in the life of the human race and to give it an appearance of unreality it does not really possess. Man cannot ignore his *human* origin. He must have the solid earth as his spring-board even when he attempts to leap into the azure heights above him.

It is the metaphysical problem that is here discussed, with its bearings upon the practical issues of our modern life. It is very evident that if approaching the historical aspect of Christianity from the viewpoint of Christian experience must influence our critical methods of treating it, the same viewpoint must have a still more vital bearing upon its metaphysical implications. The science of metaphysics aims



at grasping the Reality that lies behind the phenomena of the natural world. I perceive an object. What is this "Ego" that perceives? What is the object perceived? What is the nexus between them? These are the questions metaphysics has been trying all through the centuries to answer. It has as its starting-point the data of sense impressions upon the cognitive faculty. It seeks to understand their implications and their relation to an Absolute that exists in and for itself. It is therefore an attempt to arrive at an adequate theory of sense-experience. It has indeed at times sought to widen its basis and include experiences that are apparently not primarily those of sense-perception—involuntary judgments we pronounce ethical, but by a whole school of metaphysics these have been ruled out of court as not primary but derivative experiences ultimately resolvable into sense-impressions. While, however, ethical judgments have been included in the scope of metaphysical inquiry, either as primary or derivative, a class of immediate experiences as widespread as human nature has been largely overlooked. These are the intuitions of the religious consciousness, with the concomitant emotions they produce. No

doubt these have had a philosophy of their own, but this *mystical* philosophy does not lie in the direct line of the historical metaphysical schools. It has been regarded as an intellectual aberration, not reducible to rule or system, not subject to those canons of criticism that are applied to rational metaphysical hypotheses. The mystic has been considered interesting as a pathological study, but he brings no contribution to the accumulating store of verifiable scientific knowledge.

Now, it is the peculiarity of the present day that it has dawned upon the scientific mind that religious experience is as primary a fact of human life as is the fact of sense-perception. It is not something to be explained away, but something to be explained. It belongs to the primary data for which it is the province of metaphysics to account. It is a normal experience, for it has its root in human nature as such, and can be quickened in all into a less or greater degree of intensity. As an experience it has its metaphysical implications and is a real avenue of approach to the Absolute.

It is along this line that the modern philosopher is working in his eternal quest after a solution of the mystery of the universe.

In Germany and America especially there has developed what one may call a historico-psychological school whose aim is a thoroughly scientific analysis of the religious consciousness alike in its modern development and throughout the whole range of its recorded history. Now there is an orthodoxy in science and metaphysics as well as in religion, and the invariable peculiarity of orthodoxy is that it will never admit that anybody has trodden its own special field before it, or has anticipated discoveries that belong to the natural evolutionary process with which it is acquainted. This school of philosophy to which I refer acknowledges that the religious consciousness, so persistent in its manifestations and so consistent in its main lines of experience, bears undoubted testimony to the existence of a super-sensible Reality. But its exponents one and all hesitate to fill in the dim outline of this Reality with definite detail as to its nature and to bring it into living, throbbing contact with this mortal life of man.

It is the object of these lectures to show that what these philosophers are doing to-day has been done long ago by the great Christian theologians, and as they started long

before them, they are naturally now much ahead of them. They began with religious experience, and with religious experience, owing to a peculiar collocation of events, quickened to the fullest and richest intensity. And working upon this experience they attained to a conception not only of the Absolute as a vague undefinable Reality, but as a Triune Personality, throbbing with intense life, Who in His very essence became man for us men and for our salvation. It is a conception that has two outstanding merits. The first is that the effort to apprehend the depth of meaning that is in it affords scope for the noblest flights of human intellect. The second is that it can be taught in its concrete simplicity to the child at his mother's knee.

It is a conception, moreover, that covers all the facts and is adequate to account for them. It was reached empirically. It can be applied deductively as a rational guide to the conduct of human life in all its complex phases. It furnishes an ideal alike for the individual life and for that larger life we designate the social organism. It constitutes a perfect unity—a theory that never fails in practice, a practice that at every point finds its sanction

in theory. It consequently unifies human life, gathering up its complex faculties into a whole of co-related parts. It stimulates the intellect to the utmost pitch of its capacity, while it lays down as the condition of all higher knowledge that the ethical life be lived up to the knowledge we already possess. Its bearing upon the practical problems of our modern civilisation is therefore of the closest and most intimate kind, and in my two concluding lectures I point out that if we are to make theology live and breathe with the palpitating life it once possessed, we must seek our clue as to its meaning not in the philosopher's study, but in the field of active social effort and in the spiritual enrichment of our common life.



## **THE THEISTIC BASIS**





# I

## THE THEISTIC BASIS

GOD is a postulate of experience. A dawning conception of the eternal mystery we name "God" is an integral element in human consciousness. The idea of God, therefore, is intuitive and not ratiocinative.\* I do not mean to consider the objections that have been urged against intuition as the method of grasping the Great Reality, as these seem to lie in a definition of the word that divorces it from our intellectual faculties. I am not concerned here with a philosophic theory of knowledge. It is enough if I make my position plain. We know God as a psychical experience—the root and ground of a series of experiences, the profoundest, the most deeply cherished, and the most real of which human nature is capable. We do not reach the idea of God as the final

\* See Note A, "The Intuition of God."

and irrefragable result of a long chain of syllogistic reasoning. Neither do we find God vindicated to the intellect as the crown of a slow and patient induction from data given to us in consciousness.\* No doubt the apprehension of God is an intellectual act, but it is an intellectual act that is saturated with emotion. The rapture of the saint at the beatific vision is something different from the quiet satisfaction of the student, who, after long musing, works out his problem to a logical conclusion, and in every genuine apprehension of God, however faint and feeble it may be, a touch of this mystic quality is present: God comes to the soul as a living experience appealing to intellect and heart alike when He approaches the soul at all.

If this be so, has the theistic argument no meaning or validity? Is there any use holding up a lighted taper to see the sun or wasting one's energies in proving axioms? Certainly, if the sole value of the long search after God by the processes of the logical understanding lay in its demonstrated result, one would be inclined to say that it had all been lost labour and remained simply a tremendous monument of misdirected intellectual force. It

\* See Note B, "The Cumulative Arguments."

is very doubtful whether a single individual has ever found God as the sequence of a syllogistic process. To-day the agnostic points out hopeless flaws in the argument, and the vast majority of intellectual believers ground their faith on a totally different basis. But though we cease to hold these arguments as demonstrations of God's existence they are still essential elements in enriching our knowledge of God. Rightly apprehended, they have an all-important place in the communion of the soul with God, and in strengthening those tendrils of faith with which the human spirit grasps the Divine.

For when we analyse all the leading lines of thought along which the human understanding has sought to rise from the finite to the infinite, we find that, while they fall short of demonstration, they undoubtedly fulfil a threefold purpose. (1) They serve to vindicate the reasonableness of a conviction otherwise induced. Grant the hypothesis of God and the universe becomes rational. It conforms itself to the categories of our human faculties. We can understand and investigate the "why" of things, because the processes we see around us are similar to those which a rational will sets in operation to attain desired ends. (2) They unfold the inner nature of God. They enable

us to realise the attributes of the Divine Being who is the source of all that is. From our finite experience of the processes of intellect, will, and emotion in humanity and of utility and beauty in nature we can enter into the inmost soul of God, who is the light and life of His created universe. And (3) they help to explain the perplexities and anomalies that cloud the intuitive vision of God. They are invaluable as a Theodicy vindicating the ways of God to men, throwing light on the problem of evil, penetrating beneath the surface of things, and grasping the increasing purpose that is being slowly unfolded amid the apparent chaos of conflicting elements that bewilders the awakening human intellect.

It may be said, "If God is an intuition, an illumination, a primary instinct of human nature, why is all this elaborate process of reasoning necessary to vindicate our conviction of His existence, to unfold His nature, and to account for His ways? Must He not be as inevitable to human existence as all other instincts, and will He not simply vindicate Himself inevitably in the ordinary processes of life? What is the use of an intuition that is so very dim and uncertain, that requires so much clearing up, so many buttresses from arguments

that are never quite convincing and are continually changing their ground?"

It is an old objection—the objection of the rationalist at every stage of philosophic thinking, and it must be met on his own lines. When we say that God is an intuition, an experience, or, rather, the postulate of all rational experience, we do not mean that God reveals Himself to every human soul in all the riches of His inexhaustible nature and so impresses His existence upon the mind that it becomes henceforth an inevitable intellectual conviction. This is absurd, and yet it is practically the position to which the opponents of the intuitional theory would seek to tie us down. All that can possibly be meant is that every human soul that emerges upon the sphere of time is accompanied with a sense of the mystery of the infinite, and that this is as essential a part of his consciousness as any other. But just as consciousness of the outer world in its organic unity grows and develops, so does this consciousness of the infinite assume depth and reality. When human nature advances along the lines of a natural and rational evolution the idea of God lies at the basis of all intellectual progress. The purer and higher the idea of God the richer and more varied is the intellectual life, the more brilliant

its efflorescence in all those spheres of mental activity which show the marvellous possibilities of human nature. And equally so is it with the moral progress of humanity. The nobler the soul's conception of God, the keener will be its insight into the implications of conduct, the stronger its appreciation of the meaning and value of the great heroisms of life. The nearer the human spirit in its eternal quest attains to a pure notion of the infinite reality, on so much higher a level will life itself actually be lived. But to assert that the idea of God is a gradual evolution of the spiritual faculty of man is not to say that the soul evolves its own God, which must remain, therefore, to the end a mere subjective ideal. God is an objective fact, the Absolute Reality, but the human spirit at any stage of its progress can only absorb so much of Reality as its nature is capable of assimilating. The evolution of the human spirit is not God in the making,\* as some aspects of modern philosophy would have it. It is the human soul that is in the making, and God, its Creator, is its moulder and fashioner.

Now, a consideration of the place the ratio-cinative process holds in this development of the idea of God will explain much that would

\* See Note C, "God in the Making."

otherwise be perplexing. It explains, *e.g.*, why the theistic argument is so continually changing its ground, and why proofs that seem perfectly valid to one generation lose all their appeal with a change in the intellectual atmosphere. If the existence of God were the reasoned result of a logical process, whether arrived at inductively or deductively, then God once proved would be for the normal intellect proved for all time. We do not question the propositions of Euclid after his lucid reasoning has commended them to our intellect. We accept without a murmur the inductions of science. We believe in the existence of such a remote corner of the globe as Patagonia on human testimony, though we have never been there nor are ever likely to be. But not only is it the case that in spite of all arguments the existence of God in every age remains to many an unproved hypothesis, but the problem has this further peculiarity, that with every change in the spirit of the time the old arguments, even to the most God-intoxicated souls, seem outworn and invalid and require to be wholly recast. Any other strong conviction of the human intellect that depended upon arguments so shifting, upon evidence that with the lapse of time was continually crumbling into the

dust, would very soon be erased from the human consciousness and cast into the lumber of discarded superstitions. But who can say even in this inquiring and sceptical age that there is the slightest danger of faith in God being thus treated? On the contrary, God still remains the moving impulse of the highest and noblest minds in our generation ; the clearest thinkers, the men of the greatest imaginative genius, the most statesmanlike intellects have all been interpenetrated with the idea of God, and the failure of the old arguments has rather confirmed than shaken their faith. For at bottom faith is not reached by argument, and the failure of an argument that has outlived its usefulness frequently serves but to throw the soul more entirely back upon itself and to enable it to trust its own experience. In this region an argument that has become merely conventional, so far from being a buttress of faith, is an obstacle to faith. For in the spiritual realm reason must be charged with emotion before it produces its desired result in quickening and strengthening faith.

The existence of God as the Supreme Creator, *e.g.*, seemed inevitable to men who never questioned their intuitive belief in causation.



Every effect was the product of a cause, and however far the intellect might trace back the series of secondary causes, it was supposed to be brought up by the very exigencies of thought to the conception of a Great First Cause. The argument seemed irrefragable and to the devout mind brought assured conviction. But when the very idea of causation was thrown into the melting-pot, when there seemed to be no reason for stopping the process of infinite sequence, or of assuming an element of causality in things apart from the human mind, the argument lost its force. After all, why should we assume that human reason is the measure of all things, or that the only force is intelligent will? God is simply an assumption, not a logical induction. And may we not as reasonably assume no God, or at least withdraw from the problem altogether and leave it in the realm of inscrutable mystery? Are we bound to fathom the depths of the infinite? Is it not wiser and more modest to own the truth that we do not know, and that with our present faculties we cannot know?

Again, when a first study of nature brought to light those marvellous adaptations that maintain the harmony of material existence, the feeling that here we were in presence of a Supreme

Contriver of subtle intelligence and striking inventive skill was instinctive and immediate. Men knew of no other method whereby means could be adapted to ends than by direct contrivance. All the minute parts of a watch were fixed together by human intelligence in order to regulate the motion necessary to indicate the hour, and the intricacy of the delicate machinery so perfectly adapted to do its work evoked involuntary admiration of the genius of its maker. It was a triumph of intellectual ability. And were not triumphs quite similar in kind but wonderfully greater in degree visible throughout the whole created universe? The vast sweep of the law of gravitation that governed the apparently complex motions of the heavenly bodies and poised the habitable globe just in its right position in the deep abyss of space; the intricacy of organic structure that fitted every living creature to its environments with such accuracy of adaptation that a little less or a little more would have upset the balance of nature; the procession of the seasons, each fulfilling its own part in the development of the full-throbbing life that springs from the womb of Mother Earth—could there be more striking evidence of a supreme intelligent Will directing and control-

ling this living, breathing, pulsating universe and guiding it to a divine far-off event? What normal intelligence could resist the argument? Nay, indeed, the devout investigator into the secrets of nature, as one after another there rose before his mind fresh instances of ingenious methods whereby the organism might take full advantage of its environment, could only lift up to heaven the voice of praise and adoration and exclaim, "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches." \*

But when a closer search revealed the fact that the wonderful adaptations of nature were not the product of direct contrivance at all, that the universe did not come into existence as we know it, was not launched into empty space by the fiat of Omnipotence, but that material things are as they are to-day as the result of a long, slow process extending through periods of time that baffle the imagination to conceive, and by an extravagant and wasteful process of evolution that sacrifices millions of individual organisms to the elaboration of some slight physical advantage in a single type, then it could not but be recognised that the old teleological argument had lost the inevitableness of

\* Psalm civ. 24.

its appeal. For under the new conception the loving, divine tendance that produced the sweet harmony of nature and even tempered the wind to the shorn lamb and clothed the earth with beauty entirely disappeared. One heard no more the full-throated melody of the birds carolling in the exuberance of joyous life, or responded to the fresh vitality of the bursting springtime. Earth bathed in the summer sunshine was no longer a Paradise of God where living was a pure delight and each created organism rejoiced in the simple bliss of being. The deep abyss of heaven was not now studded with golden glory to illumine the soul in its pathway to higher realms. The view of nature presented to the modern imagination is that of a sanguinary battlefield, where war is waged without remorse or pity by each organic structure against every other, where the strongest torture and kill the weak, where thousands die by the slow process of starvation that a few who have been either lucky enough to develop a capacity for greater endurance, or skilful enough to hit upon a new method of sustenance, may survive in order to evolve a higher and more complex type. And even the orderly procession of the heavens, which filled the soul with awe at the Divine Majesty and with a sense

of security under His protecting care—what is it but a swinging of vast masses of molten matter through an unfathomable abyss, an occasional chance collocation of innumerable atoms so as to form, for a time, a habitable globe on which the curious creature man may indulge his strange aspirations and his illusory dreams, until the hurtling masses dash once more into collision and put a summary end to the fretful fever he calls life? Verily, to the modern man breathing the atmosphere of our new methods of scientific research, the simplicity of the old teleological argument only creates a smile. He tells us that in his mental reconstruction of the order of nature he has no room for the hypothesis of God.

And if these direct arguments serve no longer, the old Theodicy has equally broken down. It has always been recognised that the existence of evil in a world created by a Supreme God, absolute in His intelligence, in His will, and in His love, was a serious difficulty, demanding the strongest powers of human intellect to solve. The Apostle certainly does not overstate the case when he says that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain. Nature seems infinitely cruel to her children. The agony through which living sentient organisms are

continually reproduced, and their tendency to indefinite increase kept in check, appears to be not only wasteful but absolutely savage. The Creator would seem to be reckless of the pain He inflicts. Where there is room for one life He sows a thousand, and He reduces the number to the required limit by torture the most callous-hearted would shrink from inflicting. The briefest survey of the history of the human race makes one shudder at the brutal cruelties through which men have advanced even to the incipient stage of civilisation we have reached. The low moan of human pain that runs through the centuries, the despairing shrieks of tortured humanity, haunt one like a nightmare. Is it only thus that the higher life of man can be evolved? Can the destiny of the human race be achieved only through Sicilian Vespers, Spanish Furies, St. Bartholomew massacres, and the nameless horrors which have characterised the attitude of man to his brother man, under every form of government, with the sanction of every shade of religion in which humanity has sought a shelter? What are we to make of the vast discrepancy between human ideals and human actions? If God, the Supreme Creator, is good, and goodness to the human soul is joy, why should evil so persistently dog

our footsteps, why should our spirits be so continually tormented with the horrid doubt that good and evil are but names that correspond to no real facts in the universe?

Now the Theodicies—the vindications of the ways of God to man—that have had the most powerful appeal in the past have gone upon the lines that evil is but good in the making. Evil is the element through which good realises itself. The shame of the sinner is the material that provides sustenance for the glory of the saint.\* Pain is disciplinary. Taken in the right spirit, it purifies the soul and develops the rarest and the choicest virtues. Besides, we must take a long view of life if we would see its meaning. The world is the training school of the soul. If we accept God's teaching, if we but use our opportunities and our advantages aright, if we learn the lessons of experience, then will the human spirit advance from strength to strength, triumphing over every obstacle, till at last it reaches the true end of life and realises

“That perfect presence of God's face,  
Which we for want of words call heaven.” †

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\* “The vices of some men make the virtues of others, as corruption is the parent of fertility.”—*Walter Savage Landor*.

† “The Palsy of the Heart,” Lord Houghton.

This consideration of the nature and meaning of evil weighed greatly with George John Romanes, who lost his faith so completely only to receive it back again charged with a richer content. "If Christianity be truthful in representing this world as a school of moral probation, we cannot conceive a system better adapted to this end than is the world or a better schoolmaster than Christianity."\* Browning is full of the same theme. His poems are the clearest exposition of the theological optimism that was a striking characteristic of much of the higher literature of the Victorian Age.

"Then welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!  
Be our joys three parts pain!  
Strive and hold cheap the strain,  
Learn, nor account the pang: dare, never grudge the throe."†

But here again it is singular how far the dominant note of to-day has departed from this cheery optimism. It is true indeed, and absolutely obvious, that in the moral and intellectual world difficulties instead of being hindrances are often helps to attainment. It

\* "Thoughts on Religion," George John Romanes.

† "Rabbi Ben Ezra," Robert Browning.



is further true that pain is a valuable discipline and in many cases begets in the soul a largeness of character and a depth of sympathy that raise it in the scale of being. But here also we find that prodigal waste that characterises nature in the physical field. Evil does not always bring forth good. Straitened means, hardship, disappointment in the early years of life, may be to a Richter \* or a Carlyle a most salutary discipline, may enter into the very fibre of their being and so strengthen their nature as marvellously to quicken their insight into human life, and to sharpen and vivify their powers of expression. But these were special cases, great souls, capable of triumphing over every difficulty. Alas! how many thousands of aspiring spirits who might have enriched the world by adding to the sum of vigorous, cultured personalities have had their existence soured and embittered and their budding powers rudely blighted by adversity they were not strong enough to overcome. In the stern pressure of circumstances the

\* "The poor historical professor would not for much money have had much money in his youth. Fate does with poets as we do with birds—it darkens the warbler's cage until he has caught the oft-played air he is to sing."—*Richter's Autobiography*.

promise of their lives found no fruition, their songs remained unsung, they died with all their music in them. Poverty, utter and absolute—a poverty so complete as to own nothing save, from day to day, the barest means of sustenance—may work out the beautiful soul of a St. Francis of Assisi, living in an ideal world, untrammelled by the flesh, the life of flawless love to men, a life more-over suffused with the rapture of the open vision of God. But this again is a rare experience. Such poverty produces in countless millions only an abject degradation, a whining mendicancy, an impoverishment of faculty, a hardness of heart and callous cruelty of nature, that sicken us at the loathsomeness of humanity. Pain—quivering, intense—the agony of lacerated nerves, may indeed be the birth-throes of higher, nobler forms of existence. The hero who purchases his country's freedom with the anguish of his life attains to a greatness of soul that may be accounted worth the sacrifice and vindicates the rationality of the evolutionary process. The martyr who opens to the soul of man the beatific vision even through the tortures of the rack, the wheel, and the faggot, has asserted the triumph of the spirit over the flesh and

indefinitely raised the ideal of human life. Suffering such as theirs can at least be made intelligible. But what of the nameless millions who by the cruelty of nature or the more refined cruelty of man have "trod the way to dusty death" through torture that had no balm in it, no purifying influence whatsoever? What of nature's misfits and abortions, whose diseased or imperfect organs have doomed them to a slow and agonising process of extinction? What of the myriads who have been swept away by the great scourges of humankind, famine, plague, and war, with all the possibilities of their lives undeveloped, simply that man might learn the most elementary rules that govern his mere physical well-being? The old Theodicies to-day seem to leave the mystery untouched, nay, even to excite a feeling of revolt and repulsion against a theoretical optimism that has never gone down to the depths of the abyss. As a writer in the *Hibbert Journal* says, "There is some excuse for a human vivisector. He is choosing between two forms of suffering, a lesser and a greater, and he chooses the lesser. But to Omnipotence vivisection is a luxury, an amusement, a crime. No Jesuit who ever stepped would adopt such infernal means, no matter how great the end.

It were far better to acknowledge no God at all than to bow down to such an embodiment of evil, such injustice made carnate." \*

Now in the old theistic arguments and Theodicies which seemed, on the whole, so satisfactory to the religious mind, it must be admitted that such considerations as have been adduced were never altogether absent. An element of mystery in the divine nature, of inscrutability in the ways of God to man, was freely granted. But a solution of the difficulty was sought by an insistence on the permanence of the higher life of man. If humanity advanced from stage to stage in its progress through a mortal agony that recked little of individual suffering, still the advance was there. The individual perished, but the race endured, reaching upwards to higher intellectual heights, sounding deeper depths of spiritual emotion. If individual lives were rudely blighted, if the soul had barely room on earth for its faculties to bud, the blossoming and fruition went on unhampered by the decay of the mere tabernacle of flesh. The vindication of God, therefore, did not necessarily mean an explanation of His existence or of

\* "An Agnostic's Consolation," by Mrs. F. Peterson, *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1908.

His providence that dispelled the perplexities of this earthly life or cleared up all its anomalies. It was enough that it indicated a rational process running through the seeming chaos of the yeasty ferment of humanity, that it opened up lines of thought through which it was conceivable that in the end the purpose of creation might be justified.

But here again it must be recognised that this is a point of view from which the modern mind is drifting. It is not freely granted that the end of a perfected humanity justifies the means through which it is attained, even if such an end were within the limits of conceivability. Men are no longer satisfied with the prospect of joining

“The choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In lives made better by their presence.”

They are living now, thinking emotional beings, an interpenetration of spirit and flesh, and they will no longer, willingly, lose the joy of life, that their children's children may ascend to higher heights than they dream of. And as for the immortal life of the pure Christ-loving soul, granted that the doctrine be true, what solace is that to human misery? Such

an immortality can only be for the choice spirits of earth. It has absolutely no meaning for the degraded millions whose souls have been crushed out of them by the sordid cares and anxieties of a pinched and starveling existence. To the modern mind the glory of immortality is dimmed. It is not that it is denied. On the contrary, the fascination of the problem is probably greater than ever it was. But simply because men are reasoning about it, they have ceased to feel it. It is no longer a living factor in their thoughts, a faith, certain and sure, as of their own existence.

Such then seems to be the temper of the age to which the modern theologian makes his appeal. In presence of such an attitude to the great problems of life he has to vindicate the utility of his existence. He has to assert himself as an economic factor that dare not be left out in the construction of human society. He has to restate his position in such a way that it will fall in with the lines of argumentation that alone appeal to the modern intellect. He is indeed in a somewhat peculiar position. He has no longer to combat the cool, scathing intellectual criticism which was dominant even a generation ago, or to meet the passionate energy of debate which is the

characteristic of all discussions that vitally touch the core of human life. He is too often regarded rather as an effete force who can safely be ignored. He is talking of matters in which men are not interested and which seem to have no pressing application to the details of their ordinary existence. To argue with him is a mere waste of time. To deny his propositions is as futile as to affirm them. It is many years since Matthew Arnold set this fashion of criticism in his "Literature and Dogma," summing it up in his famous dictum that "Miracles do not happen." The attitude to-day is well expressed in the following words:—"The facts of life (the hideous cruelties and degradations of our modern civilisation) invincibly prove religion a nullity. Man will not give religion two thousand centuries or twenty centuries more to try itself and waste human time. Its time is up, its probation is ended: its own record ends it. Mankind has not æons and eternities to spare for trying out discredited systems."\*

Now what is the dominant note of the modern attitude towards the great problems of life with which the theologian has to

\* "Human Submission," Morrison J. Swift, quoted from Professor James's "Pragmatism," p. 31.

reckon? How can we characterise the changed intellectual atmosphere we find pervading alike the speculations of the thinker and the vague inarticulate movements of the great masses of the people? Is it not simply the increasing intensity of the assertion of the rights of the present? It cannot be denied that throughout the Christian centuries the stress has always been laid in the past and in the future. Man has been defined as a being who looks before and after. The definition is a just one. But the charge that is brought against him to-day is that in the intensity of his gaze into the remote past and the keenness of his speculation to limn the outlines of the dim and distant future he has neglected the miraculous Now which is his only real possession. He has gone back through the ages of history and has even tried to span the inconceivable tracks of geologic time to catch a glimpse of the Great First Cause, and has forgotten that the only God who has any real meaning for him is the God of the Here and Now. He has exhausted his imagination in painting the glories of the future abode of bliss, he has strained his intellectual faculties to their utmost limit to trace the details of that evolu-



tionary process through which life is rising on an ever ascending scale to the fulness of perfect being, while his heart has been hardened to the present cruelties through which the end is being effected and he has missed all the opportunities that have offered him of tasting the true joy of living. But the heart of humanity is revolting against such an attitude towards life. It is wholly irrational. After all, to-day is the only Reality. Eternity must be cognised by us under the form of Time. Human life is not a mere passage from mystery to mystery, to be entirely taken up in vain gropings into the inscrutabilities behind and the inscrutabilities before. Human life is the only real thing we know. It comes bringing to us duties we must do and do at once, problems we must solve on the spot or perish, pleasures we may enjoy, but which are forever lost if we refuse to taste them. And the strength of the agnostic position so widely prevalent lies in the fact that it keenly realises and interprets this inarticulate craving of the human soul, while its weakness consists in its utter inability to give that fulness of satisfaction which the heart of man desires.

This insistence upon the rights of the pre-

sent is the dynamic of every vital movement in life and thought to-day. We see it in politics, where the popular orator no longer appeals to the heroic deeds of the past or paints in glowing colours the future of Empire, but takes his stand upon the slums and protests against any nation, however great, advancing to higher heights of glory upon the massacre of little children or the starved bodies and souls of a submerged tenth. We see it in the woman movement, still a puzzle to so many, which is based upon the ineradicable moral instinct that every human being has an inherent right to the development of all the faculties of his or her nature, independent of sex, and to the full pleasure of existence that comes from such development. We see it in art, where the grand style is at a discount, and the artist whose appeal is widest seeks his subjects neither in the historic glories of the past nor in mystic visions of the future, but in humble cottage interiors, in the stern stress of the toiler's life, or in endeavouring to convey the impression which the colour and harmony of nature make upon his actual vision. We see it in literature, where the books that have the widest circulation are those that show the one half of the world how the other half lives, that strip life

of its romance and idealism, and strive, for good or evil, to get down to the fierce struggle of the elemental passions. The crudest realism finds a ready response, but poetry has no public. Everywhere convention is cast aside and men are intently gazing upon the living present. And we see it also in philosophy, where alike the lofty speculations of the idealist and the hard reasoning of the materialist are being superseded by a hand-to-mouth pragmatism which holds that truth is what works and that the ideas which lift the soul above the cares and perplexities of life and suffuse it with a present ecstasy are true just in proportion to their efficacy.

Everywhere we are confronted by this attitude, and it is to this attitude the theologian must appeal in laying firm and sure, for this generation, the basis of his Theistic faith. We cannot be surprised that one ethical tendency of the modern spirit is towards a revival of the cultured Paganism of ancient Greece. The characteristic of the old Greek life, in its sunny joyousness, resting on a dark background of cruelty and vice, was undoubtedly, to use the phrase of Benjamin Kidd, the "Ascendency of the Present." Christianity broke up this life completely and for ever by

subordinating the present to the future, by teaching that duty was higher than pleasure, and by claiming for every soul of man, and not merely for the few, the whole fulness of emotional and intellectual life. And although with our loss of the keen vision of the future the Ascendency of the Present returns, it cannot ignore the centuries that have been. The renaissance of Paganism to-day, undoubted fact of our time though it be, is, therefore, a mere transient phenomenon whose roots are not deep enough to make it a force requiring to be intellectually grappled with. The rights of the present which are claimed to-day are the rights to the whole rich inheritance of the past, the spoils of Time which have been handed down through the ages, and which must be free to every human being according to his capacity of assimilating them. The varied and inexhaustible treasures of the Christian centuries are not to be thrown aside as mere useless lumber. Humanity has won them by a more than mortal agony, and is not likely to let them go.

Here, as at every critical period of the world's history, it is Jesus Christ and His teaching that must come to the rescue. There is no doubt that in ages of a different

intellectual temper from this the theologian has laid the stress of his reasoning on the past and on the future. He has sought his Supreme Creator and his Sublime Artificer far back in the eternity that existed before time began. He has devoted endless labour to a study of the records of Holy Writ in order to prove their genuineness and to establish their veracity. He has piled up whole libraries of eschatological speculation to give a local habitation and a name to his aspirations after a perfect felicity or his dread of a long despair. With eager intellectual pertinacity he has sought for God everywhere save where he was most likely to find Him—in the recesses of his own soul.

I am speaking of the intellectual search. It is the province of theology with which we are dealing here. I do not mean to say that in the Christian centuries there ever has been a time when man has failed to find God in his inmost heart, or when God has failed to talk face to face with His chosen ones as a man talketh with his friend. The whole rich record of Christian experience affords abundant testimony to the joy of the religious life, to the ecstacy that has wrapt the soul that has felt the immediate presence of its God. "Thou

hast called from on high," says St. Augustine, "with a voice loud and clear, to the inner ear of my heart, and Thou hast triumphed over my deafness and I have listened to Thine accents: Thou hast enlightened my blindness and I have seen Thy light, and have learned that Thou art my God. But there was a time when I knew Thee not! Alas for the time when I did not know Thee! Alas for the days of blindness when I did not see Thee! Alas for the hours of deafness when I did not hear Thee! I have loved Thee only too late, O Beauty, living and eternal! Alas for the time when I did not love Thee!"\* This is the language of religion which has run in continuous stream all through the centuries. But it cannot be denied that this living experience has sought its sanction and its objective validity not in itself, not in its immediate cognisance of God, but in arguments based on data that were wholly outwith experience. And for this reason it is, to-day, too often looked upon merely as a delusive dream that has no practical relation to the real life of humanity.

Neither do I deny the utility of the theologi-

\* St. Augustine, "Soliloquies," quoted from "Exposition de la Morale Catholique," par E. Janvier, vol. i. "La Béatitude."

cal arguments that have sought for God behind and before, in the heavens above and in the depths beneath. In their own time and place, and taking them for what they were worth, they were and are invaluable to the Christian soul. Metaphysical speculation, in every age, has at least done much to vindicate the objective reality of God, and to strengthen the soul's intuitive conviction that the tendrils it threw out to the divine are not grasping mere vacuity. The labours of Christian scholarship have cleared the lineaments of Jesus, the Saviour, and brought us face to face with the eternal Human in the midst of Time. And eschatological speculations have kept alive in the heart of man the reality of that life and immortality which was brought to light by our blessed Lord.

But our theology to-day must be permeated with the spirit of the age, and must join in this emphatic assertion of the rights of the present which is its dominant characteristic. And for this purpose it is not enough to appeal to the fact that religion lifts the soul above the cares and troubles of earth and floods it with joyful experiences. Christian experience is not all joyful. It can sound the depth of despair as well as rise to the height of felicity. And

if its felicity be based on mere illusions what better are we? There is joy enough often in the hallucinations of the insane, but that is not the joy that has any appeal to the living rational soul of man. Human life must be based on Reality. And the task of theology to-day is to vindicate this Reality. Theology must face the fact that the only Reality possible to the human soul is the Reality that comes through experience, that the only God the soul can grasp is the God of the Here and Now, that the only affirmations regarding God that have any meaning for the reason of man are those that find their verification in his own experience, that a living theology, in short, can only be the sublimated essence of the racial experience of God claiming the allegiance of the individual soul because it is but the ideal of his higher self appealing to his own best instincts. Is not this the meaning of the sublime declaration that God created man in His own image? And this living theology must react on the whole life of man. It must be shown to cover the whole field of human activities. It must be the master-light of all his seeing, the motive-spring of all his doing. A really living theology can never possibly be a mere department of science. Theology was



well called the Queen of the sciences, and though in these days she has been dethroned from her lofty altitude, she still claims it *de jure*. For the object of theology is to show that God is the God of the living—not the dead, that all the satisfaction of scientific investigation is but the joy of the human mind thinking God's thoughts after Him, that the pleasures of art are but the instinctive striving of the spirit to express life in terms of the ideal beauty, and the passion of ethics is but the infinite longing of the human soul to be joined for its own enrichment in a corporate unity with every other. The message of theology to-day to the great bewildered, struggling mass of humanity, longing for a happiness it feels to belong to it of right, but which it can in no wise grasp, is that God is the God of the living—not the dead, that life can only be lived in its fulness by those who see all things in God, whose joy is the God-inspired joy of universal being, whose souls touch life at every point, and therefore experience the thrill of that eternal vitality which we name—God.



## INSPIRATION AND REVELATION



## II

### INSPIRATION AND REVELATION

GOD is an experience. A clear grasp of this point of view must of necessity determine our attitude towards the vexed questions of Inspiration and Revelation. God can be known only in so far as He comes in contact with the human spirit, and His Revelation of Himself must always be a personal revelation to the individual soul. No other revelation is even conceivable. The beauty of colour, the symmetry, harmony, and grace which characterise nature, are personal revelations to individual men. To the blind, to whom they do not thus come as personal experiences, they are unimaginable. What does not in some way or other touch our experience is for us simply unmeaning. What, by its very definition, is incapable of touching our experience is, so far as we are concerned, non-

existent, and may safely be left out of our calculations.

But this does not exhaust the matter. After all, God is a racial experience as well as an individual experience. And this forces us to consider the question of Revelation under two aspects. What is the revelation God has made of Himself to humanity? What is His revelation to me as an individual? The content of the two revelations must inevitably be very different. The grasp of God made by the total sum of finite spiritual being cannot fail to be immeasurably greater than that made by a mere infinitesimal portion of such being. Let it be granted that I have certain spiritual convictions that are part of my very nature. I believe in God as I believe in my own existence. I know there are certain deeds I ought to do, and others I ought to avoid at the peril of my soul. There is a life I must live or be for ever disgraced in my own eyes. Now I may stop here, and if I do, I may say that this is meantime the sum of God's revelation to me. But I dare not say that this is the sum of God's revelation to the race. Nay, with so many voices telling me of spiritual heights to which I have not attained, of spiritual visions I have not seen, of spiritual raptures I have

not experienced, I should be false to my own conviction of the truth of my personal revelation were I to doubt that God has taught others truths that are not yet mine, that He has brought others to an inner shrine of His Temple which my feet have not been permitted to tread. On the basis, then, of experience as the ground of all genuine revelation, the individual soul is bound logically to acknowledge that there is, for him, an objective content of revelation somewhere in humanity to which he must pay reverence, and which it is possible for him to realise.

Where is it, then, this objective content of Revelation, and what is its organ? Now, I wish to premise that no spiritual faith that has ever claimed and held the allegiance of large masses of men, and has been a real factor in human development, can be properly characterised as false. Neither is it right to speak of such beliefs as containing more or less of the truth. Truth is truth, and when once we have a grasp of a true principle we are getting a glimpse of the Absolute Being of God, and we may hold to it with assured conviction amid all the fluctuations of human opinion. But a true principle may be wrongly applied. Men are so applying them every day, both in

philosophy and science, and are learning by their failures the real meaning, scope, and application of the principle they have got hold of. It is the way of experiment, the only way by which genuine progress can be made. And nowhere is this method practised on a wider scale than in the large movements of human history.

The great Christian thinkers, *e.g.*, have always recognised that as there is undoubtedly an objective content of Revelation of which they were continually catching glimpses in their own experience of life, and whose deeper truths were revealing themselves to their souls in their silent hours of meditation and thought, that content must lie in the spiritual experience of the race, and especially in the experience of those men and women whose souls were touched to fine issues, and who were able to give authoritative expression to the weltering turmoil of longings, desires, insights, joys, raptures, and satisfactions of the spiritual life. And it was easy to pass from that to the conception of a Church which embodied all the highest men had thought of God, all the profoundest men had known of His working with the human soul—the whole racial experience, indeed, of spiritual emotion, with its magnificent heroisms, its



intense raptures and its awful dread, the sum total of the mighty upheaval of the spirit of man to meet the infinite mystery of God. Nor are we surprised to find that as thought on the subject grew clearer it was recognised that such a Church must be an Infallible Church, must be able to speak to the soul of man, groping after the ray of illumination that penetrated his envioning darkness, with one voice, distinct, unhesitating.\* I venture to say that such a Church—a Church that was simply the incarnation of the total sum of spiritual truth attained by man at any stage of his development—would be to the individual an infallible guide. He who had the gathered result of all human experience to direct his steps, and was willing to obey its dictates, could not possibly go wrong. The principle is sound enough. It is its application that has invariably been defective. And the beautiful logic of Romish writers at their best, so convincing in its lucidity—for it is based on this conception of the Church—results simply from the fact that they are reasoning in an ideal world concerning an ideal Church, which never had any existence in this perplexing world of ours, whose anomalies con-

\* See Note D, "The Catholic Church."

tinually tear to pieces all our syllogisms. The Catholic ideal is one thing; the claim of the Church of Rome to Catholicity is quite another. And what is frequently overlooked is the fact that the attraction of Rome, which to certain souls of a fine temper is undoubtedly very great, results largely from the substitution of the one for the other. It is simply treason to the human intellect to recognise the claim of the Church of Rome to be the depository of the content of Revelation or to acknowledge its infallibility in any sense in which the word has an intelligible meaning. Nay, further, it is treason to the only idea on which the claim can rationally be made. A Church can never be Catholic which ignores the spiritual experiences of a vast portion of the human race, and the claim of Catholicity in such a Church is the source of infinite mischief to itself. A true principle wrongly applied is bound to do harm rather than good. A force that works smoothly and sweetly in a huge and complicated mechanical structure, because the force is nicely adapted to all the intricate details of the machinery, might rend to pieces, if unmodified, a mere portion of the mighty fabric. The law of gravitation which holds in stately poise all the symmetrical parts of

a great Gothic cathedral, because grace and beauty in every lordly column, springing arch, buttress, mullion, and finial, are carefully calculated to withstand the force of superincumbent weight and thrust, would bring the whole magnificent building to the dust if even a leading corner-stone were removed from its place. It is the symmetry of the whole that lends to each part alike strength and dignity. And it has been the right conception of what constitutes the Catholic Church, sectarianly applied, which has resulted in all the errors that have corrupted the Church of Rome, and has dethroned her from her supremacy over the spirit of humanity. Her infallibility has been shipwrecked on the rock of fact and history. Her "Index Expurgatorius" is the monument of her failure to interpret the spiritual experience of the human race. Her intolerance, which has banished from her communion some of the noblest of God's sons and daughters in order to maintain a mere sectional theology, has for ever deprived her of the shadow of a claim to Catholicity.

But, again, Protestantism, thrusting the idea of Catholicity into the background, has sought to find the objective content of Revelation in an Inspired Book. Holy Scripture is undoubtedly,

and must remain, in a peculiar sense, the Word of God. In this Protestantism has hold of an indubitable fact. I am endeavouring to make no theological presuppositions that are antagonistic to my fundamental thesis that God is an experience and revelation is always personal. And therefore I wish only to accord to Scripture the place that the universal religious consciousness of humankind has assigned to it. But Protestantism in its historic manifestation has given it a different position—in its own estimation a higher, certainly a narrower. Holy Scripture has been regarded not only as containing the objective content of Revelation, but as summing it up in its totality, as being at once the first and the last word of the revelation of God to His children. The Bible, instead of being looked upon as a medium through which a revelation can come to the soul, has been taken as the revelation itself. Its pages were dictated by the Holy Ghost and committed to writing by inspired penmen. It is consequently authoritative not only in those matters that can be grasped by the human spirit and verified through experience of life, but also on points that fall outwith all possible experience or are subject to quite a different kind of verification. The Bible is inerrant in its details, literal in its



and yet he knew that in his main contention—that the Word of God was contained in Holy Scripture—he was undoubtedly right. He knew it simply from the fact that God through Holy Scripture had made a revelation to his own soul. The objective content of Revelation appealed to his spiritual instinct and verified itself in his religious experience. And so we find that in all the great Confessions of the Reformation the authority of Holy Scripture was placed on an absolutely sound basis. Nothing can surpass the clearness and majesty of our Westminster Confession on this important subject. “We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellences and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and

with the Word in our hearts." Yes, this is the impregnable rock on which rests the authority of Holy Scripture, and it brings us back from all our theorising to the fundamental thesis of religious truth. God is an experience. Revelation must be personal. "The Word of God" enshrined in Scripture "is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."\* But it is a long leap from such a position as this to maintain that a man must without doubt perish everlastingly unless he believes that nine-and-twenty knives, neither more nor less, were carried from Babylon by the returning exiles, or that eight hundred thousand valiant men followed David to the field. The two orders of facts are not in the same plane, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which convinces of sin and reveals Jesus, the Eternal Son, as the only Saviour, cannot possibly give us infallible assurance of historical events or scientific truths. Even supposing the science of criticism, of which our Reformers were profoundly ignorant, had only served to prove to the hilt the traditional authorship and

\* Hebrews iv, 12.

origin of the books of Scripture, and abundant contemporary evidence could be adduced for every historical event they narrate, from their own point of view the mechanical theory of inspiration was untenable. Their real theory, as stated in their Confessions, was absolutely sound, and if only succeeding generations had had the courage to carry it to its logical issue, historical Protestantism might have been saved from many a false position. For with the liberation of the intellect from the shackles of a spiritual despotism the process of criticism of the Scripture record was inevitable. It was inherent in the very conception that constituted the essence of the movement of Reform, viz., that God alone was Lord of the conscience. To hold this truth as a watchword of our life means that we must of necessity submit to searching criticism any institution that claims to be divinely ordained, any documents that profess to contain God's Word. The Christian who accepts this fundamental principle of the Reformation owes a supreme loyalty to truth alone, and must above all things be faithful to the revelation God makes to his own soul. It is a doctrine that shatters Bibliolatry at its base.

And a consciousness of the inadequacy alike of any Visible Church or of the Bible to be the



organ of an objective Divine Revelation has led the modern theologian almost universally to place the ultimate authority for divine truth in spiritual intuition. It is recognised that God is an imperative need of the human soul, and that those spiritual experiences that are common to the human race and are always deepest and richest in the finest souls of the race cannot be dismissed as merely the hallucinations of morbid natures or as passing phases in the development of humanity to higher rational levels. They must mean something and must be reckoned with in our psychological analysis. And yet, while here again the modern theologian undoubtedly grasps a truth of vital importance, is it not the case that, for the most part, he leaves the searching soul dissatisfied? Nay, is it not the case that his appeal is, to the great mass of the people, essentially weak, that he preaches a gospel that has little converting or compelling power? For it is a notable fact that modern theology has not been able to break away from its inherent subjectivism and to step boldly forward into the realm of definite reality. Its tendency has been to dissolve religion into a vague sentimentality. It has fostered a pious emotion that has no real strength in it, because it has no living concrete

Personality to draw it forth or has developed a pretentious æstheticism which seeks to clothe itself with the charm and beauty of a living faith to which it has no claim and which it cannot really comprehend. The religion of the spirit in its modern phase is a reaction against a religion of authority which had gradually forgotten the true basis on which alone its authority could rest, and the reaction has resulted in the loss of the idea of authority altogether as an essential element in religious truth. The whole conception of an objective content of Revelation has been dropping out of sight. Spiritual truth is considered to be only what commends itself to the individual soul, and the steadying influence of the results of the experience of past centuries of religious life and thought is rejected as a mere spiritual tyranny.

The name of Ritschl is very closely identified with this whole school of theology,\* if that can be called a theology whose central characteristic is the rejection of metaphysic. It is to him undoubtedly that directly or indirectly much of our modern theology owes its inspiration, and to Ritschl and his school must be assigned the honour of reviving theology from the neglect and even contempt into which it

\* Cf. Garvie, "The Ritschlian Theology."

had been sinking in the minds of philosophic thinkers, and of pointing out the method by which alone its results could be vindicated and could take their place in the catena of scientific truths. But Ritschlianism as it is commonly understood, and especially that shallow Ritschlianism which forms the backbone of the popular theology which floods the religious press at the present day, is fatally tainted with a subjectivism from which it finds no way of escape. It is undoubtedly true that there can be no knowledge of God, and no saving comprehension of the divine nature and the divine method of salvation, that is not a living experience of the individual human soul. This is not only true, it is a truism. But if the authority of the Church and the Bible be rejected, the individual experience cannot be regarded as the final authority for facts so transcendent as God's existence and the reality of the Christian theology through which this experience is gained. The soul may indeed have a vivid consciousness of an overmastering Personality, a deep sense of imperfection, aspirations after a fuller and nobler life which find their ideal in Jesus Christ, but after all these may be merely hallucinations, pathological experiences, to be cured by a deeper

immersion in the business and pleasure of the world. The soul must indubitably trust in the reality of its own experiences. It can do no other. They are given data calling for interpretation. But the soul that trusts merely in its own experiences cannot get out of itself, lacks the key by which its experiences are to be interpreted. It has no assurance that these experiences connect it with a realm of genuine reality. To say with Ritschl and his school that this assurance is not needed, that the spiritual judgments of the human soul are judgments that have worth for itself inasmuch as they give it internal peace and a consciousness of a higher dignity, while at the same time maintaining an agnostic attitude to the transcendental doctrines of theology and only a wavering belief in the very existence of God Himself, is simply to misinterpret the meaning of that divine craving of the human spirit on which his whole theory rests. What I, as an individual, wish to know, is not my subjective experience of an infinitely varied spiritual emotion. That I know already, and I know further that it will not leave me in peace, so long as I am determined to live on the higher levels of life, until I am assured that it is an emotion responding to a divine

stimulus. I want to be certain that God is, and is the rewarder of those that diligently seek Him. I want to be thoroughly satisfied that this genuine longing after the true, the beautiful, and the good, which I pursue in spite of terrible obstacles and strong temptations that are ever dragging me down to lower levels on which life would be so much easier, is a longing that is worth indulging and has within it a guarantee of ultimate success. No theory of life that puts these experiences simply on the level of mere wishes and desires, no theory of life that does not regard the spiritual experiences of humankind as the correlate of objective metaphysical realities, will ever satisfy the religious instinct.

So then even the most elaborately reasoned out attempt to vindicate the rationality of our spiritual experiences while divorcing them from any metaphysical basis cannot be said to have succeeded. A spiritual intuition which consists in mere value-judgments valid only for the individual cannot get out of itself and embrace the great Reality—and no conception of religion that is not rooted in reality can ever lay hold of the spirit of man. Indeed, to the average intellect it is simply unintelligible. The very idea of such a mere subjective religion

rests on definitions which only a philosophically trained mind can grasp, and which such a mind must ultimately reject as sophisms. And experience abundantly proves that it has no real strength in it, no compelling power to lay hold of the soul of man struggling amid manifold temptations and force it to higher levels of life. The religion that speaks effectually to the average man must speak in a tone of authority. True, it must be a reasonable authority—an authority to which his conscience responds. But it must be at the same time an authority far greater and higher than his own undeveloped religious instincts can admit or even understand. It must be an authority, moreover, enunciating truths, clear-cut and well-defined, truths which, though they involve ideas far beyond his comprehension, yet overshadow him with the vague consciousness of a Presence to whom his inmost soul knows by a mysterious instinct he ought to yield himself. Religion, in short, if it is to produce its characteristic results, must come to the soul as a revelation from God having a definite content which the individual soul could never have evolved from itself, and which therefore comes as objective Reality, while at the same time it strikes

chords in the soul to which it instinctively responds. God meets the soul from without, and the awakened spirit humbles itself at His Holy Presence.

Is there then such a revelation, and if so, where is it? Is there such an authority in religion, and to whom or to what institution has it been confided? Every religious man knows there is such a revelation and such an authority, and yet every definite answer to the question must at best be imperfect and, in our day at least, tentative. The religious man knows because of his own experience. His faith is always far larger than he can give a rational account of. Whenever he tries to state his reasons for his creed, they seem strangely inadequate to explain the sublime conceptions that exalt his soul. And yet if his creed is to be other than a mere superstition, he must go on stating his reasons for it, he must continually seek for it an intellectual vindication, he must be always endeavouring to co-ordinate it with those rational conceptions which regulate his thinking and form a practical guide to his daily life.

We fall back again then upon the basal fact that God is an experience. God reveals Himself to the individual soul. The spiritual

experiences of the individual are as real as any other experiences. They are as real, *e.g.*, as our perception of the outer world of sense. They are as real as our consciousness of our individual existence. Professor James, in his analysis of the varieties of religious experience among men, has, at least, vindicated this fact, that the religious consciousness cannot be dismissed as merely pathological.\* It is not simply a morbid mental state to be treated by the expert in mental diseases. True enough, as his critics remark, he need not have gone so far to prove his case. The normal consciousness even of healthy-minded individuals as truly bears witness to a realm of mystery in which the soul of man resides as the abnormal and exceptional. But, even so, it strengthens the argument to find that the impartial inquirer is forced to the conclusion that the mystic raptures of souls specially sensitive to spiritual impressions are inherent elements of human nature, calling as imperatively for interpretation as the sense-perception and elemental consciousness of ordinary individuals. The religious sense is as genuine as any other sense.

\* Professor James, "Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature."



If this be so, are we to rest content with taking our spiritual experiences as mere subjective emotions? Are we to say that they are valuable in so far as they give us a thrill of spiritual joy, as they console us in our times of trial, as they stimulate us to work for the larger good of humanity; but they are mere emotions, created by a vivid imagination, pointing to no objective Reality? God is a figment of the imagination. The story of the Eternal Son and His wonderful love for sinners and the supreme agony through which He wrought out the salvation of man is one of those vivid myths in which the struggling, suffering soul of humankind reads a deeper meaning into its personal anguish than it really contains. It is evident that if this is all the value we are giving our religious intuitions and experiences, we are placing them on a distinctively lower level than those other subjective impressions through which our self-consciousness is realised. If we accept the trend of modern psychology in assigning a real place to religious experience as a factor in normal human existence, then, surely, we can only maintain their pure subjectivity by a thoroughgoing agnosticism of a type that has been extremely

rare. If we shut ourselves up within our own personal consciousness, if we maintain either that there is no reality at all, or that there is no possibility of knowing reality, if we hold that our sense-perceptions reveal to us no objective world, but only a series of disconnected impressions, if, in short, we fall back upon the primitive scepticism of Hume, and regard the Ego itself as merely a bundle of fortuitous impressions and ideas, then we may, logically, consider the religious sense as equally subjective with the other senses and look upon it as pointing to no reality outside of itself. But that is a position that has long since been discarded as untenable.\* And the moment we get out of our own personal consciousness, the moment we recognise that our sense-impressions bear witness to a reality that is not ourselves, and that our self-consciousness involves the real existence of an Ego, that moment our spiritual experiences clamour at the closed gate of the awakening soul and demand their legitimate outlet. We cannot say that our experience of a material world is a real experience, and

\* The most thoroughgoing modern attempt to work out a logical Agnosticism is to be found in Karl Pearson's "Grammar of Science" (Contemporary Science Series).

our experience of a spiritual realm merely a delusion of the imagination. We dare not say I am I, an individual being having a personal identity, but that mysterious Presence through which the "I" reaches a deeper consciousness of its marvellous capacities is a nothing, an empty phantasm, a mere shadow cast by itself. Nay, if subjective experience is to have any validity at all, we must take experience as a whole, analysing all its parts, giving to each its natural value and endeavouring to find the objective reality to which each part testifies.

And if we do, is it not possible to build up on the data given by spiritual experience a knowledge of divine realities which shall at least be as valid as any other branch of human knowledge? From the data given by the senses the scientist has constructed a theory of the material world which gains universal acceptance—an acceptance that is universal because he is building on data that are universally experienced. He has discovered the forces that work in that objective reality we call the material universe, and he is able to apply these forces to meet the material needs of human beings. Why should it be impossible then for the theologian to

do what he has done? He, too, has his data. The spiritual experiences of the human soul are, if infinitely varied in degree, practically universal. Wherever the experience is deep and well-defined it unites itself with other experiences as being similar in nature, proving that the spiritual realm inhabited by human souls is a unity. The theologian has precisely the same elements to work upon as the scientist, and there seems no *a priori* reason why his results should not be quite as satisfactory.

But if he is to be successful he must proceed on the lines that regulate all scientific research. He must begin by a careful analysis of the spiritual consciousness. All the great theologians have ever done so. What can be finer or more soul-satisfying than the masterly analysis of the great Apostle of the Gentiles carried on through his marvellous epistles with such rigorous scientific precision? It is almost universally recognised that St. Paul's theology is a psychology. We are well aware that the permanent discoveries of science are all based on a long catena of inductive reasoning. It is not sufficiently recognised, and yet it is as absolutely true, that the formulæ of theology which have the characteristics of

permanence—of Catholicity—are based on a similar foundation. The theologians who have exercised the widest influence are those who have probed the spirit of man to its depth, and the doctrines that have most profoundly touched the human heart have been those that have been wrought out, under divine guidance, through the agonies of struggling, despairing, aspiring souls.

The theologian must therefore proceed by a careful examination of his data, by a rigid scrutiny of the facts of religious experience. Of course, he must have had a profound religious experience himself. *Pectus facit theologum*. But just there he must be very cautious. I have already dwelt upon the inherent subjectivity of the present day systems that work from the standpoint of spiritual intuition as the seat of religious authority. The reason is that the thought uppermost in the minds of their exponents is the spiritual intuition of the individual. It is the individual consciousness that is to be the test of truth. There is no truth that is above the individual consciousness and which must therefore be received on authority veiled in a halo of mystery. Hence the difficulty of these systems in breaking away from a mere

personal subjectivity and getting into the realm of objective reality.

But the analysis of the religious consciousness means an analysis of the religious consciousness of the race. It is an analysis that can only be effected by one who is of the race, by one who is in sympathy with all forms of religious thought and feeling, by one to whom all religious experience is possible, in so far, at least, as it comes within the limits of his own personal capacity. That is to say, it must be intelligible as being in the line of his own experience. There may be, in the data on which he works, heights of spiritual rapture into which he feels he can never soar, there may be depths of spiritual despair he cannot personally fathom, there may be a clearness and definiteness of spiritual insight to which he can never attain. For he has to deal with the expression of spiritual emotion as it comes full charged with meaning from the lips of those great religious natures in whom the life of the universe has throbbed with the most intense vitality. He has to take account of the visions of those clear-souled mystics who have reflected with the most definite outline the essential being of the Eternal.

He has to accustom himself to tread those higher levels of existence on which the very few who have brought God close to the beating heart of humanity have found their natural dwelling-place. And in his research among those higher spiritual spheres he will undoubtedly find much, very much, that is beyond the capacity of his own experience, much that transcends his own comprehension. But he will find nothing, in so far as he is dealing with genuine data of experience, *i.e.*, with the emotions and ideas that have been living personal experiences of the consciousness of individuals similar to himself—nothing to which he does not feel himself somehow personally related, nothing which does not respond to some chord, faint, deep-hidden, in his own nature. He is dealing, in short, with the totality of spiritual experience, with spiritual experience as it embraces all the emotions and ideas that the great soul of humanity has ever felt or known, and it is simply because he is part of humanity that he is able to pursue his quest, and, again, it is because he is only a part of humanity that his personal experience lacks the wholeness that can alone make experience the authoritative organ of spiritual truth.

For what assures us of metaphysical reality is not our personal experience. It is the universal experience as ratified by our own personal consciousness. This material world with all its marvellous forces as apprehended by myself may be a pure delusion. I have as vivid an impression often in my dreams of a wholly different world which I judge to be a pure delusion. But when I know that the matter and force which I regard as outside of me and as something different from my own consciousness are so regarded by all human beings having a nature similar to my own, and that the impression they make on me is identical with that they make on them, I at once pronounce them to be real. They become workable entities, super-phenomenal realities. And so must it be in the spiritual world. My spiritual experiences are merely subjective so long as I regard them as merely my own. But when I find they are shared by others, nay, when I find that in their leading features they are common to the race, then at once I pronounce them to have an objective basis, to indicate a spiritual reality as worthy of research as is this material universe, a knowledge of which comes to me in precisely similar fashion.

And further, if I wish to gain a rational con-



ception of what is meant by matter and force, to whom do I go? I do not merely question my own crude immediate perceptions. Neither am I satisfied with the confused conceptions of men and women who have never even tried to develop their intellectual capacities. I study the works of the scientist who has probed nature to the bottom, who has isolated and analysed its phenomena, who has clarified his immediate perceptions by straining them through the fine sieve of a rigorous logic. Shall I proceed otherwise in my search after spiritual truth? I must not rely upon my own crude and imperfect religious conceptions. Neither is it sufficient to study the dim religious groping of the great heart of humanity, even though that is sufficient to satisfy me of the objective reality of that of which I am in search. I must appeal to the great masters of religion, to those who knew by intimate union with the immanent Reality what I can only know by myself in a dim, far-off, uncertain way.

And if I do so, am I not brought up at once by the overshadowing Personality of Jesus Christ, by universal consent the Divine Man, that is to say, stating it in the lowest terms, the Man who had the greatest fulness

of divinity in Him, in short, the most religious Man who ever lived on earth? The theologian who would know God, the Eternal Substance, the Supreme Reality underlying all phenomena, must begin by analysing the consciousness of Jesus Christ. If we want to know anything of natural science we go to the scientific expert—to the man who to a strong natural bent for scientific research has added the labour of a life in the way of study and experiment. If we want to know anything about religion we must go to the religious expert, to the clear-souled man who has seen God, has lived through his own convictions and has found them thoroughly satisfactory. And at the head of all such stands Jesus, alone in His kingly majesty, the one Being who felt Himself in such intimate union with the Eternal that He dared to say, "I and the Father are one," and who spoke with such living power on the duty and destiny of man that it is perfectly safe to assert no one who has ever honestly and with all his heart and soul and mind tried to live up to His ideal has ever looked upon his life as a failure. Jesus stands in the front rank of those whose experience is normative in the spiritual world.

But Jesus does not stand alone, and is not to

be studied as an isolated phenomenon.\* There is a latent fallacy in the cry, "Back to Christ," and in the attempt to secure an Absolute Religion by investigating the consciousness of a single individual while ignoring its developments in history or treating these as mere mental aberrations. Jesus was an elemental force, and it is impossible to study a force apart from its manifestations in the world of nature and of life. Life is not static. It is dynamic. It evolves. The essential energy that forms its substratum is in continual movement and is continually revealing itself phenomenally under new forms, which open up new avenues of insight into eternal realities. Jesus, as an elemental force, exercised the most remarkable influence on His spiritual environment of any personality of which history knows the existence, and an intimate and sympathetic study of that influence is as essential to an understanding of the meaning of His Personality as an analysis of His own sayings. In the souls of His immediate followers He induced beliefs and excited emotions which have no parallel in the spiritual records of the human race. He created an experience among them, unique, soul-satisfying, so perfectly assured of its own

\* See Note E, "Harnack and the Abbé Loisy."

content that it changed their whole way of living, was impervious to the argument of its opponents, and made them willing to face torture and death rather than deny its veracity. Nay, not only was this the characteristic of the impression made by Jesus on His own immediate followers, the force He brought into the world increased in intensity with advancing years, and wherever it was felt it excited the same emotions, induced the same fundamental beliefs, opened up to the soul the most wonderful visions of the spiritual realm, which were apprehended with the vividness of reality. It was an apprehension of reality that stood every test that could be applied to it. It was an experience that stirred the spirit to its depth. It was a common experience apprehended practically in the same way by all who came under the influence that stimulated it. I say, practically in the same way, because the variations were no more than are characteristic of all human experience. The note of human experience of reality, in any of its phases, is that, while there is always something personal in it, personal even to peculiarity, it is, in its general features, fundamentally the same. And was this not just the characteristic of that insight into the mysteries of the spiritual

world that was gained in the early ages of Christianity, when the followers of Jesus, shaken loose from the world of sense by bitter persecution, were forced to live for the spiritual world alone, and thus felt the full energising of the Spirit of their Master? Surely, next to the close study of the consciousness of Jesus Himself, there can be nothing that will help us more to determine the objective content of that spiritual universe to which experience testifies than a careful consideration of the religious experiences with their correlative beliefs of the generations to whom the breath of the new spirit came in its first vividness and intensity.

It will be said that there have been other great spiritual teachers who stand in the front rank of the world's religious leaders whose experience must have a validity as great even as that of Jesus Christ. If we are to measure the greatness of men by the intensity and diffusion of their influence, and if the measure of their greatness must be for us lesser men the norm of spiritual truth, will not Sakya-muni, Confucius—nay, even Mohammed—have as much to say in determining the validity of our spiritual emotions and the objective content of our experience as Jesus Christ Himself?

I admit at once that these great authorities may not be omitted in our search after the Great Reality. The experience realised by them is a factor of the utmost importance. We are in search of the Great Revelation given by God of His ways to the children of men, and that Revelation must consist of the sum-total of the human soul's experience of God. It must be the gathered result of the insight into the divine mysteries of all high-souled men whose hearts God has touched and who have willingly responded to the divine call. And therefore the science of Comparative Religion must be an integral element in every theological discipline, and is bound to shed a fuller light on any definite results that are attained. But into this region I have neither time nor ability to enter. And for my purpose there is the less need, inasmuch as even a slight knowledge of the great world-religions outside of Christendom shows that they in no way contradict the fundamental principles of Christian experience. Nay, indeed, so striking often are the analogies that they have frequently been adduced as evidences against the claim of Christianity to be the unique Revelation of God and His supreme will with men, as if the uniqueness of Christianity consisted in its

entire difference from all other religions, instead of its capacity to subsume them all under its own categories.\*

I repeat, then, that in our search after the universal or Catholic element in the spiritual experience of humankind which forms the objective content of Revelation as distinct from the individual's personal apprehension of truth, which must at best be partial and fragmentary, our first resort must be to those great souls who scaled the heights of spiritual experience and plunged into its fathomless depths. But supposing we were successful in eliminating the transient and accidental from their experience and gathering up its results into a common formula, am I bound to accept it without appeal as a statement of objective truth? By no means. The humblest individual has his rights as an entity in the sum-total of spiritual being. There can, indeed, be no gathered result of human experience that does not include his experience. From the very fact that he is a spiritual existence he is related to all spiritual experience, even the highest. But this fact, while it gives him the right of trying and testing the spiritual truth that appeals to his consciousness, gives him no right to reject

\* See Note F, "The Value of Religious Experience."

all that does not immediately respond to the test. Nay, inasmuch as vast tracts of the spiritual domain which he has not entered, and of whose reality therefore he cannot personally judge, are vouched for by others whose veracity is undoubted and has at the same time a certain vital relation to his own experience, he is bound to give a provisional assent to their assurance and to accept their statements by an exercise of faith. Is there anything unreasonable in this? Is it not the universal method of attaining knowledge? Why should I be expected to accept the conclusions of a Newton or a Kelvin regarding the great laws that govern the material universe—conclusions I have not verified, conclusions, it may be, whose rigorous scientific verification I may not even have the capacity of understanding—on the penalty of having my sanity doubted, while if I accept the statements of Jesus Christ, or even of Athanasius, as to this spiritual realm of which I know myself to be an integral part, I am to be looked upon as a devotee of an outworn Creed? I accept the one on precisely the same grounds as I accept the other. I accept the results of scientific research when they are vouched for by men of eminent scientific



authority, who have proved them to their own satisfaction, and who submit the proof to all who are of a scientific bent of mind for their ratification, and because, moreover, these results fit into the practical world with which I am acquainted, explaining anomalies and furnishing a workable guide to practical action. And I accept the results of spiritual thinking on the data of Christian experience because they, too, are vouched for by experts of unquestionable authority in the spiritual order of the universe, who also point out the methods by which the knowledge they impart can be attained, methods which have never really failed when adopted by men of genuine religious instincts, and, furthermore, because they explain the perplexities of this bewildering human life and bring to the soul a stimulus and a joy that nothing else can induce. Let it be remembered that all great truths are subject to a scientific and a practical verification. The scientific is only for those who have the necessary qualifications for working it out. No profound generalisation affecting human life is intellectually verified by any but an infinitesimally small number of those whose whole working practice is modified by it. All the world accepts the law of gravitation. A few mathematicians

have mastered Newton's "Principia." And it is the practical verification that is the authoritative, the verification that comes from discovering that the new principle works, that it passes the experimental test. It is not otherwise in our quest after the objective content of Revelation. Our insight into the spiritual world must be attained in a manner similar to that by which we gain our acquaintance with nature's laws. It is the inspired consciousness of the higher spiritual natures to which authoritative systems owe their origin. But these, in turn, can never exercise their full authority until they are absorbed into the processes of human life and ratified by the individual experience.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN  
DOCTRINE**



### III

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

I HAVE insisted on the fact that our spiritual experience has the validity of all other human experience—neither more nor less. If we are to maintain that perception brings us into contact with an objective reality which we call the material world, then we must equally assert that the intuitions of the religious faculty, common to the human race, assure us of the reality of the spiritual realm. I have further tried to point out that just as all natural science is but the analysis of our common sensible experiences and the inferences that can be drawn from such analysis, so theology is but the reasoned statement of the implications of the spiritual experience of humankind. All are agreed that scientific research has done much to reveal to us the

wonders of the natural world and to explain the meaning and method of the forces that govern it. No one doubts the objective validity of its formulæ. No one denies the influence of those elemental forces which act upon his physical structure or hesitates to take advantage of those clever inventions which a knowledge of natural law has placed within our reach. But theological research has given us no such universally accepted results. It is not that in the spiritual sphere there has been any lack of personal experiences, of irresistible forces, or of clear-cut, definite conceptions to account for them. But these spiritual forces have not been universally recognised, neither, when recognised, have they received an explanation that has been accepted as universally valid.

Indeed, it is a matter for which the theologian has to be thankful that the tendency of the present time is to admit that he has a certain, if somewhat precarious, standing in the scientific world. It is not so long ago since there seemed a real danger that all the rich content of the spiritual experience of humanity, with its glowing visions of a supreme beatitude, its sublime despair in the consciousness of its imperfections, and its hymns of rapture or of agony at the various stages of the upward

struggle—a real danger that all that seemed to represent the most precious treasures of human history should be cast aside as useless lumber. For, of course, if this experience have no objective validity, then it must be a mere hallucination, a waking dream, and the study of religion can be nothing more than a branch of pathology. It can only come in as a subsection of mental disease. But to-day it is being more and more clearly realised in all independent research that Reality is spiritual rather than material, that the Force behind nature is not an Unknowable we can safely leave out of our calculations, but genuine Being, in some sense Personal, who has a real correspondence with our intuitive moral instincts. This is one of the results of the focussing of life upon the present to which I alluded as a striking characteristic of our times. The rationalist looks before and after. His premises are in the past. His conclusions are in the future. And thus, by neglecting the miraculous present, he may get rid of God. But the mystic, the experimentalist, who sees God, always comes to his own when the minds of men are wholly occupied with the Eternal Now.

But even those philosophers who admit the

objective validity of our spiritual experience, and are willing to allow us to rejoice in the presence of God, are most resolute in preventing us advancing a step further. There is a spiritual realm to which our consciousness testifies, but it is a realm of mystery into which no human soul can penetrate. There is a Personal Will in the universe, but of that will we can predicate nothing except that it is on the side of the True, the Beautiful, the Good. We cannot interpret God in terms intelligible to the human mind without adopting the language of parable or allegory, language which does not convey any permanent truth regarding the Infinite, but which changes from age to age and from race to race. All religions, in so far as they make definite statements regarding God and His ways with men, are but hazarding guesses. Religious doctrines are but figments of the imagination, and this is as true of the great doctrines of Christianity as of any other. These are merely symbols, useful for the unlearned, as a means of raising them to the divine, but never the assertion of universally valid truths. In short, religion is genuine, its Supreme Object is real, but our apprehension of the divine has no definite content. It remains a sentiment, a mystery, to be cultivated by the higher spirits



as one of the graces of life, and to be tolerated in whatever form it shows itself. The position cannot be better put than in the words of Royce in his "Philosophy of Loyalty":—"Religion, therefore, precisely in so far as it attempts to conceive the universe as a conscious and personal life of superhuman meaning, and as a life that is in close touch with our own, is eternally true. But it is just this general view of the universe as a rational order that is indeed open to our rational knowledge. No part of such a doctrine gives us the present right as human beings to determine with any certainty the details of the world-life, except so far as they come within the scope of our scientific and of our social inquiries.\* Hence, when religion interprets the world-life to us with symbolic detail, it gives us merely symbols of the eternal truth. . . . But the parables, the symbols, the historical incidents that the religious imagination uses in its portrayals—these are the more or less sacred and transient accidents in which the 'Real Presence' of the divine at once shows itself to us and hides the detail of its

\* But this last clause begs the whole question. The claim of Christian doctrine has always been that it is a scientific inference from certain experiences of individual and social life. Theology has no other conceivable basis.

inner life from us. These accidents of the religious imagination endure through many ages ; but they also vary from place to place, and from one nation or race of men to another, and they ought to do so."\* I quote these words because I think they are representative of a school of philosophy that has wide currency at the present day. They sum up the attitude towards religion of a large number of thoughtful and highly-cultured men. And, indeed, it is a matter of gratification to note that in this attitude we have a striking advance from the agnosticism of the last generation. God is acknowledged as a Reality—the validity of spiritual experience is admitted. There is a divine, a supernatural basis for ethics. But while we may know the fact of God, that is all we may really know. "The detail of His inner life is hidden from us." The tragic struggle of the soul for a definite Creed which forms the background of human history has been but the substitution of one myth for another, the effort to depict in ever clearer outline the features of an allegoric fairy-tale.

But, in all fairness, having got so far as to admit God as an interpretation of human ex-

\* Royce, "Philosophy of Loyalty," p. 397. See Note G, "Professor James."

perience, is it possible for the intellect to stop there? The road that has led us to this point seems at the first blush to lead us a good deal further. The knowledge of God is recognised as the inevitable inference from experience. It is God alone who unifies experience and makes it intelligible. God, in short, is the postulate of experience. But experience claims to know a good deal more about God than the fact that He is. Experience claims to have come in contact with some, at least, of the "details of that inner life" which in their totality are veiled in mystery. Jesus knew more of God than this, and, as I have maintained, the experience of One so supreme in the spiritual realm must have for us an authority of the very highest order. Jesus knew that God was the Father of all human creatures, that God "loved humanity into life," that though men persisted in rejecting His paternal love and following to their own destruction the allurements of sin, yet whenever with penitent and contrite heart and true hatred of their sin they turn to the Father, whose love has been overshadowing them all through their wayward course, the Father joyfully welcomes them and receives them back into the Home they had despised. Is this conception of the nature of God, then, simply "part of the accidents of the

of the nature of God and His relation to man given to the human soul by Jesus Christ. One single glimpse into the nature of Divine Being that perceives something definite suggests that deeper insight may gain still higher truths. The enlargement of the soul's experience demands wider intellectual categories to cover it. In the spiritual life of beings so richly dowered as man is, experience and knowledge must go hand in hand—nay, they must be inextricably interwoven with each other, knit together in a union so close that it is hard to tell where the one ends and the other begins.

Now this is just what happened in the history of the Christian Revelation—that elemental force which came into the world with Jesus Christ and caught up the souls of men into such sublime heights of life and thought. Gradually in the course of the centuries the ideas of men regarding the origin, the nature, and the purpose of this force found definite intellectual expression, and left us in possession of that Christian Creed which, in its leading features, has been accepted by all the most highly civilised races of the world as an explanation of the mystery of God and man, in so far as the mystery is explicable to finite minds. The Creed of Christendom simply forms the intellectual background of

Christian experience. It is the *rationale* of that intense spiritual life which has throbbed in the souls of those who have come under the influence of Jesus Christ throughout all the centuries during which that influence has been the most vital force in humanity. It comes to us, therefore, as the objective content of Revelation, appealing to that instinct for the divine that is an essential feature of our nature. It contains truths that are above our immediate apprehension, truths which are not at once verifiable by our consciousness, and which are therefore objective and apart from our individuality. They can only be guaranteed to us by the concurrent testimony of souls similar to our own who have wrought them out through their experience. But while the Christian Creed is thus objective and outside of our immediate experience in its first appeal, it links itself on to our consciousness by quickening emotions that verify the immediate appeal it makes. The soul awakened to the appeal of Jesus may not be able to grasp the whole Christo-centric system of the universe contained in the Creed, but it does grasp that particular point of the system that concerns itself. And it is because the portion that is apprehended is an integral part of the whole, and the spirit that apprehends is

part of that totality of spiritual being which has lived through and intellectually grasped the whole, that the authority is complete. It is the whole wealth of the spiritual experience of humanity that guarantees the fragment of the treasure that enriches the individual soul.

And, here, let it be understood that when I speak of the Christian Creed I refer to the three great truths that constitute Christianity an intellectual system—the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement. No doubt Christendom is rich in experiences that testify to a wider and deeper knowledge of divine mysteries than the bare apprehension of these basal metaphysical facts regarding God. But these great verities, viz., that God is a triune Personality, that the second Person of the Trinity was Incarnate in Jesus Christ, that He became Incarnate in order to undo the effects of sin and to bind God and man in an intimate spiritual union—these three great verities constitute the metaphysical background of Christianity and have been accepted as of the very essence of the Christian religion wherever specifically Christian experiences have agitated the souls of men. The statement may be disputed. There are many to-day, there have been some at various periods of history, who claim and have claimed the

name of Christian while denying these metaphysical bases of the Christian faith. There are many, indeed, who make this claim simply because of a general approval of Christian ethics. But in a matter of nomenclature the appeal must always be to the common usage of the great mass of humankind, which is always based on correct general principles. However great the number of Churches, sects, and parties into which Christendom is split, all who remain distinctively Christian hold fast by these fundamental verities. And I think it may safely be maintained that the whole process of religious history shows that if you eliminate these articles from the Creed you have nothing left but a vague sentimentalism which has no grip over the mind or conscience of the great mass of the people. And, again, it must equally be admitted that, accepting these as a philosophical account of the problem of being and the historical process of human life, while intellectual difficulties are by no means dispelled, we have at least a theology which reduces to system the perplexing phenomena of human life and throws a flashlight on the mysteries and paradoxes of human activity.

If, then, we would understand the Christian

Creed and realise the claim it makes upon our allegiance, we must approach it from within and grasp the only lines along which its verification is to be found. We are so far away in time from the period when its articles were promulgated, and the outward conditions of our religious life are so different from those that environed the tumultuous upheaval of spiritual emotion which formed the irresistible motive power behind their formulation, that we are apt to lose sight of the manner in which its conclusions were reached. Moreover, it is of the nature of spiritual ideas to become crystallised, and thus to lose the throbbing life that constituted their truth. "Truth is an ethical concept," Royce tells us,\* and this is just one of the remarkable rediscoveries of the present age. When spiritual truth loses its ethical content it ceases to be truth and becomes falsehood. In spiritual conceptions knowledge and experience are inextricably woven. When the experience ceases the knowledge is void. If we take the metaphysical conceptions involved in the Nicene Creed, *e.g.*, as being an objective Revelation of the Divine Nature having no relation to our human experience, they become unintel-

\* "Philosophy of Loyalty," p. 327.



ligible, and we are lost in amazement that the finest spirits and acutest intellects of their time should have thought them worthy of such passionate discussion. Or, again, if we look upon Scripture as an inspired collection of oracles from which the truth regarding God and His revelation to the universe is to be gathered by a collation of passages, we shall be equally at fault. For Scripture—the literature of an ancient people—does not readily lend itself to such treatment, and the ideas of its various writers, living at such different periods in history, are not easily brought under the rigorous definitions of a consistent Creed. But we are not thus to approach the Creed, because it was not really thus it was formulated. Its articles were living truths thrown up by the great heart of humanity, labouring under an influence unique in human history and charged with emotions to which it sought to give expression in intelligible words. They were never mere logical inferences from external data to be apprehended and verified in the dry light of reason. They were forged in the white heat of a passionate fervour by men and women who felt their truth so keenly that they were willing to submit to any torture rather than disown them. Their claim

therefore is, not that they are ideas regarding the mystery of Being authoritatively revealed to us by men whose credentials are supported by external evidence, but that they are truths of the divine nature and of the relation of God to humanity so vitally interwoven with the tissue of existence that they naturally emerge from an exhaustive analysis of the sum-total of human experience. That is their undoubted claim. They are the ultimate truths of Being—the postulates of the highest, purest, most soul-satisfying experiences to which the human soul can attain.

Let us trace the historical process more in detail. Jesus Christ made His advent into the world as a link in a chain of human experiences that reach back into the dim dawn of history. The religious consciousness of the Hebrew race, while in essence akin to the consciousness of all other great races of humanity, has this note of uniqueness, that it attains to a measure of self-consciousness which was strange to them. What was implicit in their religious ideas becomes explicit in the Hebrew interpretation of the universe, which therefore furnishes a philosophy of the historical process that has commended itself to the judgment of civilised mankind. It is admitted that the

fundamental ideas of Hebraism are true, that the Hebrew had a genius for religion, as the Greek had for art and the Roman for law. In this long process, then, during which the Hebrew race was living through its conception of God, and attaining to ever clearer ideas of His nature and His purpose in the development of humanity, Jesus has His distinctive place. It is a place of unique importance. It marks an epoch alike in the external, the spiritual, and the intellectual history of mankind. With Jesus the history of the Hebrew nation as a living influence in the development of world-history comes to an end. Jerusalem falls within a few years after His death, and the children of the patriarchs cease to have a local habitation. With Jesus, too, the religious ideas of Hebraism reach their climax. There is no further development. Jesus represents the full fruition of those religious conceptions towards which the prophets had been, often unconsciously, striving.

And at the same remarkable period of human history the great creative philosophical systems of Greece, which seemed always trembling on the brink of a wonderful discovery, had run their course and were waiting for a full flowing tide of Reality to flush their empty

categories. The thought of the Orient had exhausted its explanation of the mystery of life and was seeking, by contact with Western civilisation, to enrich its experience.

It was just then that Jesus started humanity on a new line of intellectual speculation. How did He do it? By the propulsion within the human spirit of a new spiritual force. An experience, startling, supernatural, inasmuch as it was outside of all that had hitherto been regarded as natural, threw the human spirit into a tumultuous emotion, and while revealing the depth of baseness to which the soul might sink, opened up visions of supernal glory to which it was capable of rising. It was no teaching that produced this result; it was no thrilling oratory of prophet or philosopher; it was no mystic initiation into the occult. It was the fascination of a Person. It was the Presence of One who, when he lived with His immediate disciples as a Man among men, made existence luminous for them, made them feel that life had no difficulties, that earth had no sorrow, that pain and heart-sickness were dream-like reminiscences of an evil past: One moreover, who, though His bodily Presence had vanished away, could still by His spiritual Presence produce the same

results, excite the same emotions, wreath the soul in a halo of blissfulness so intense that it became insusceptible of bodily torture, and could change the gloomy portal of death into a radiant gateway leading to immortal glory.

We are dealing with literal facts. I do not think it is possible for us to realise what Jesus was until we have absorbed the spirit of the heroic age of Christianity. I confess I never felt how intensely real the presence of the God in Christ was in the Titanic struggle of the primitive Church as when I stood in the catacombs of Rome surrounded by the touching symbols of exalted faith and cruel martyrdom. If it be the case that "truth is an ethical concept," and that Reality is to be as legitimately apprehended by the emotions as by the intellect, we may not hope to get at the truth of the Christian faith by lifting it out of its natural atmosphere of emotion and transferring it to the dry rarified air of reason. We must take our stand rather on the bed-rock of fact, and when we are dealing with facts the passion of the saint is of as vital importance as the syllogism of the logician.

The Christian Religion made its first appearance in the world then as life, not doctrine, as vitalising energy and not as an intellectual

system of the universe. It was a rapture, an ecstasy, in which men felt that the dream of the perfect life was realised, that by a sudden leap human existence had burst into full fruition, and its meaning, hitherto dark and dim, was now clear and explicit. For Jesus in His ethical teaching furnished a practical guide to the blessed life, and in the mystery of His Person a sanction and a motive-spring that made His teaching luminous and its hardest precepts a delight. The old ethics, whether among Jews or Gentiles, had become stiff and formal. The way to the higher life had been hedged in by thorny precepts hard to obey, and a course of discipline that drew the soul ever further away from all that was simple and natural into a complicated intellectual maze. Moreover, there was little in it to inspire the courage of the searcher after truth, to still his doubts, or to console him in his frequent disappointments. But to the soul that had fallen under the glamour of Jesus all was different. The teaching that fell from His lips was as simple and lucid as the air of heaven or the light of the sun. It was as if the human spirit had been led from a foetid and polluted atmosphere to a clear mountain top, as if scales had fallen from blinded eyes and the panorama of God's world had been

gloriously transfigured. It was not that His teaching was accepted because of any preconceptions they had formed as to His nature or the source of His authority. It was simply that His words had such a living power in them that they seemed to lift from the soul an oppressive load that had been choking its life, and straightway that life burst forth, rich, spontaneous, in the full joy of conscious being. They were children of God, and the God-life was the essence of their existence. They were heirs of immortal glory, though long enthralled by the power of the Evil One. That explained all. That was why they recognised Jesus as the Son of the Living God. That was why they beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father. That was why they loved Him so, and why to submit to Him and live out His precepts was the most blessed experience in all the world.

And this life of God was inherent in humanity—it pulsed, however faintly and feebly, in every human being, and therefore their hearts must be drawn forth in love to all men. It was all perfectly simple and natural in the lofty altitudes to which Jesus raised their spirits. The life of hatred and malice and envy and lasciviousness and drunkenness—this was the unnatural life. It was the life of misery, the

life of those who were slaves to the Devil and the enemies of God. Those who lived this life were the poor, wretched, pitiable prodigals who had spurned their Father's home, and were feeding on husks only fit for swine. They were to be followed with tears and entreaties. They were to be loved by those who had realised the better way, even when they spurned their love ; they were to be forgiven, prayed for, surrounded with kindly tendance, for the Christ-loving soul must love all, must be eternally lapped in a luxury of love.

It was on a common rapture like this that the first Christian community was formed. It was an ecstasy that sought expression alike in deeds and in words. But its first deeds of brotherly love resulted in an impossible communism that almost shipwrecked the infant community,\* and its first words were mere mystic ravings, the spasmodic efforts of a soul trying to utter the unutterable.† Nevertheless, the force that lay behind the rapture was too real to evaporate in mere exuberant effervescence. It only required time and experience to consolidate itself and to find adequate expression alike as an ethical code and an intellectual system. It was in the very nature of things that the ethical

\* Acts iv. 34.

† 1 Cor. xiv.



interest predominated. That was the primal impulse, the core, the essence of the whole movement. The Christian community was a brotherhood, based on the principles that all human gifts were of divine origin and were bestowed not for the enrichment of the individual who received them, but for the benefit of the whole community. The individual gave of his best to enrich the common treasury, and from it he received, not what he had given, but the united sum of the powers and talents of all the brethren. He lost his narrow solitary life in the great flood of spiritual vitality that emanated from Christ, and he found it again reinforced by the full-flowing current of this throbbing life. All this had to be reduced to system. A community had to be built up on the basis of love, with all those practical philanthropic institutions which were the outcome of the Spirit of Christ. This was the first work of the Church. The Church adopted as its programme the words of our Lord in the wonderful vision of judgment recorded in St. Matthew and proceeded to give it effect. "I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I

was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." \* The Christian community was not at first known by the heathen as a new philosophic school, having specific ideas on those great speculative mysteries of Being that agitated the minds of the intellectual classes of the time. It was known, when it was really known, and not disfigured by calumnies, as a community of men and women who lived a life of simplicity and love, and who were utterly loyal to each other, even amid torture and death. Their simple faith in one another, their devotion to their friends in distress, their ecstatic visions of the unseen world, were the features that attracted attention. In Lucian's "Peregrinus" we seem to be looking at the Christians from the outside, with the eye of a man of the world who was not without sympathy with their aspirations, but who regarded their dreams of the perfect life of love with the cynical sadness of one who knew his world too well to be carried away with such childlike enthusiasms.

The glow of spiritual experience excited first by personal intercourse with Jesus, and after-

\* St. Matthew xxv. 35.

wards by the new spirit that animated His followers—the burning enthusiasm that prompted to philanthropic exertion—the delight in carrying out the details and perfecting the administration of a community based on a love that emanated from its great Head and enveloped all its members—these were the vital elements of primitive Christianity. The intellectual impulse came later. Of course, it is impossible accurately to differentiate such psychological stages in time. There was an intellectual element in Christianity from the very first, and the intellectual and practical to a large extent developed side by side and mutually reacted on each other. But psychologically always the practical came first. It was first the experience and then the explanation of the experience. It was first the practical life of love and then the metaphysical category that caught it up and made it rational. For Christianity was bound sooner or later to face the task of vindicating its position in the world of thought. It was forced by the very nature of things to become a philosophy, to link itself on to some theory of the universe. It is a naïf idea that it is possible to have a religion that does not trouble itself with the hidden mysteries of existence, and to formulate a living Creed

that is simply emotional or ethical or both, but makes no attempt at an intellectual grasp of the Reality that excites emotion and sanctions ethics. The Church that worshipped Jesus Christ as God was compelled to ask itself what it meant by calling Jesus God, and to find an answer to the question that was sufficient to explain its existence, its spiritual experience, its manifold activities, its sublime aspirations. It is just the question we are forced to ask ourselves to-day, the challenge which the historic Personality of Jesus throws down to the world. And it is a proof of the uniqueness of that Personality that even yet, in every sincere answer that is given to that question, there is something of a transcendental element, an inevitable halo of mystery that the most rationalistic treatment cannot altogether dispel. And the Church of the primitive age, suffused with the emotion of His Presence—a Church which in very truth had, for His sake, renounced the world, the devil, and the flesh—approached the problem of the Person of Jesus from the inside. It was not a problem of Being to be thought over and syllogistically solved. It was an experience to be explained and fitted in to the context of their intellectual system of the universe. And hence it was that no explana-

tion that seemed to them inadequate to cover the experience would serve the purpose. Their new faith must link itself on to the old, but whereas the old, while genuine and by all means to be retained, was cold and dead in comparison with the glowing fervour of the new, it must be brought to that white heat in which old and new would coalesce.

Jesus was to those to whom He revealed Himself the Power of God unto salvation. Of that there could be no doubt. They were as certain as any Ritschlian that Jesus was for them the Revelation of God, that Jesus had for them the value of God. But the acuter minds among them, in an age of speculation, saw clearly enough that to make such an assertion as this was to remain on the very threshold of the realm of Eternal Reality. This primitive and naïf conception of God was not merely intellectually unsatisfactory; it did not really correspond to the intensity of Christian experience. Jesus really was God, proved to be God by exercising the power of God, for it was a divine impulse that was throbbing through humanity and turning the world upside down. And if Jesus really was God, how did the fact fit in with either the Hebrew conception of the magnificent isolation of Jehovah or the

Absolute, changeless Being that formed the divine substance of Greek philosophy? Was Jesus to be reckoned simply as one of the angels or archangels that surrounded the throne of God, or as one of the principalities or powers that emanated from the abyss of the Absolute? Instinctively the Church turned away from all solutions of the problem that would have involved her in a mythology or angelology created by the religious imagination or a view of Jesus that would have made Him a Being intermediate between God and man, but different from either. She did so because she judged with the heart as well as the head, because her experience guided her intellectual concepts, and because there was one thing of which she was very certain, and that was that no definition of the Person of Christ would satisfy her that did not place Him supreme on the throne of the universe.

It is in the last degree interesting to trace the various phases through which the definition of the Person of Christ passed in the first four Œcumenical Councils.\* Outwardly the history is one of passion and strife, of unworthy intrigues, of boundless ambition and of fierce persecution. Looked at from the inside, how-

\* "The Ecumenical Councils," by William P. Du Bose.

ever, the struggle assumes a different aspect. Men spoke and acted strongly because they felt deeply. If their attitude towards each other in these disputes shows often a striking lack of that Christian charity which forms the essence of the teaching of Jesus, let us remember that to them the issue at stake was not personal, and that the very last refining grace that religion brings to the soul is the capability of combining an intense religious fervour with a loving tolerance of those who seem to be doing despite to all the soul most deeply cherishes. It was the honour of the Master that was at stake. It was the conservation of the truth that God had indeed visited man with such reality and power as to reveal the essentially divine nature of humanity and the human nature of the Godhead. Jesus was God—of that there could be no doubt. Jesus was also very Man. But if Jesus was God only in the sense that His humanity was perfect, and all perfection is of the essence of God, He still remains on the same plane with ourselves, for this is a Godhead to which, conceivably, a mere man may rise. Such a view merges God in humanity and loses the very idea of a Supreme Divine Personality. And, again, if Jesus were God in a sense that obscured His true humanity,

if He were God as possessing an essential nature that was in nowise ours, then the divine and the human did not meet and mingle, and God was removed *toto cœlo* from all real sympathy with the weakness and frailty of human nature. Adopt either solution of the problem and Christianity as a distinctive religion disappears. The facts of Christian experience are unaccounted for. There remains only either the old pantheistic or deistic theory of the universe. Jesus Christ is but a man among men—a star of the first magnitude in the spiritual firmament, but still shining with the same lustre and subject to the same limitations as other great leaders of mankind—or He disappears in the clouds of heaven and we lose Him from our sight. Hence that tremulous anxiety of definition that characterised the Conciliar period. No doubt it was sufficient for the human heart to worship Jesus as God and to feel the reality of His mystical presence in the hour of rapt devotion. But when the intellect took the matter in hand this was not sufficient. It was above all things necessary to avoid every expression that either derogated from the genuineness of His Deity or from the reality of His humanity. It was necessary because, although such expressions may have been



used by men who had no intention of impairing the Orthodox Creed, yet there is a certain logical process of thought that is as sure as the operation of the processes of nature. When the spiritual supremacy of Jesus as Lord of the Universe and the Primal Font of life is in the least degree assailed, or any view is adopted that would exempt Him from the pains and pangs of frail mortality, it is only a matter of time till His value for the soul of man ceases and the true Jesus vanishes in the complicated meshes of rationalistic systems.

But it must not be supposed that the Conciliar definitions were ever regarded as being finally authoritative. To adopt this position would be simply to fall back on an external seat of authority in religion, and such a theory can have no validity for thought. Neither was this ever the theory of the living Church. The Conciliar decision was only valid in so far as it expressed the mind of the Church in interpreting its own experience. There were Councils that failed to do so, and their decisions lost all their validity. In the technical language of the Church, that only was the orthodox faith which had been held implicitly from the first, which was held by the whole Christian world, which interpreted the experience of

every believer—"quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus." Surely the Church in this respect was on sound scientific lines. It was here as in all intellectual research. The scientific explorer into the secrets of nature creates nothing new. He only discovers and tells what is and has been from the beginning of time. And his discoveries have no weight, and indeed, absolutely no meaning, till they are found to be of universal experience. The test of the truth of his ideas, in short, is that they work and that they are the only ideas that can be trusted always to work, invariably to produce satisfactory results. The work of the Councils in elaborating the Christian Creed was to explain from the data at their disposal the phenomena of the Christian life. They assumed no infallible authority. They merely asserted their determination to define what had been held implicitly from the beginning, what was held wherever the influence of Jesus had penetrated, and what alone gave reality to Christian experience. Whatever their ostensible method of procedure was, their real method was not that of collating texts, examining documents, receiving overtures. It is the eagle eye of genius that first perceives the truth. It is the keen spiritual insight of the true mystic

which alone can explain the human heart to itself. In the details of the spiritual life the average man does not know what he believes. He must be told. And even then he sometimes denies, honestly enough, his own ineradicable Creed. The divine truth promulgated by the divine man, by the prophet, by the saint, by the council of eager searchers into the deep things of God, must go forth into the world to receive its ratification, must trust to time to verify its powers of working. It can only be recognised as the infallible truth when it is found by all competent judges to be part of the essential constitution of God's universe, when it is discovered to be applicable to the human heart wherever humanity finds a lodgment in the planet, when it explains and begets similar experiences in the souls of all who come under its influence. "*Semper, ubique, ab omnibus.*" "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum.*" That is the only authority the living Church has ever claimed for her dogmas. But that authority she claims to be infallible.

But is the test not more ideal than practical? Is it possible so to unify spiritual experience as to find it converge upon any metaphysical doctrine? Can it be truly said, in face of the vast variety of beliefs even within the Christian

sphere, that this experience converges upon the specific dogmas of the Church?

It is to be remembered that all our judgments regarding transcendental truths are partial. There is a relativity in all human knowledge that must be recognised. In this respect our theological judgments do not differ from those other judgments regarding our environments we are compelled to make in order to live as rational beings. Our knowledge of the transcendental is genuine knowledge so far as it goes—*i.e.*, knowledge that will never require to be overturned, knowledge of Reality, but not of the whole of Reality. Only the Absolute can know absolute truth. Only the Eternal can embrace the totality of spiritual experience. The Church has always recognised this in speaking of her dogmas as Mysteries of the Faith.

And in proof of the reality of Christian dogma we can point to the wonderful persistence of those central ideas which articulate the Christian Faith into a system and offer a rational explanation of the universe. The insight of spiritual genius has been ratified by the Christian consciousness and verified by the course of history. May it not be truly said that the Deity of man and the humanity of God are of the essence of the highest specula-

tive thought of all time? The message of the Gospel has an appeal for every heart, and obtains a genuine foothold in every race of humanity. Christian experience in its essential features is a unity, and the language of the spiritual life when uttered in its purity is intelligible to all souls who have felt the life-giving influence of that Holy Spirit who proceedeth from the Father and the Son. And it is the theological presentation of Gospel truth that produces the distinctive phenomena of Christian experience. The Christian consciousness will be satisfied with nothing less than a faith in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, very God of very God, who for us men and for our salvation became Incarnate and was made man. Trace the fascinating and thrilling record of Christian history from the day when the Holy Ghost descended upon the infant Church at Pentecost, and amid the vagaries of speculative thought, the welter of conflicting opinions, the stammering efforts of the human heart to give audible expression to the emotions with which it was charged, do we not find that the only conceptions that had enduring vitality in them were those that were essential to the creed that God was Incarnate in Jesus Christ?

“ So the All-Great were the All-Loving too—  
So through the thunder comes a human voice  
Saying, ‘ O heart I made, a heart beats here !  
Face my hands fashioned, see it in Myself !  
Thou hast no power, nor mayst conceive of Mine,  
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,  
And thou must love Me who have died for thee.’ ” \*

It is the deliberate verdict of the Christian consciousness. Heresies there have been innumerable, fascinating theories that, suffused with a glow of mysticism, have made a powerful appeal to the imagination, philosophical systems that have fitted Jesus, as a Man among men, into His place in the development of world-history, daring incursions into the mysteries of eternity that have cast a temporary glamour over isolated sections of humankind, but all have had their day and their vogue, and have passed into the limbo of forgotten things. This central truth has alone emerged as the common possession of Christendom, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself—that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh. Taking the words as applying to the general tendency of human history, and keeping in view the relativity of all human knowledge, the “*semper, ubique et ab omnibus*” justify a

\* Browning, “ Epistle of Karshish,”

whole-hearted belief in the essential doctrines of the Christian Faith.

But what of those sincere and earnest seekers after God who have been unable to accept the Christian Creed? Is their testimony to be of no avail? Are their spiritual experiences not to count in the general summing-up? Certainly they must. All vital experience in this sphere is relevant. But the difficulty disappears when we remember that the test is the totality of experience and that the isolated experience has value only in so far as it merges itself into the general experience. Some spiritual experiences are so rich and deep that they are able to mould the whole trend of spiritual thought and emotion. Others are so shallow that they only acquire vitality by contact with it. And, moreover, while claiming that the Christian Creed is the postulate of the richest, fullest, and therefore the truest life, the life Eternal, the life that is in perfect harmony with the constitution of God's universe, it is only for a vitalised Creed that the claim can be made, only for a Creed that is a metaphysical category giving essential unity to a life's activity. There is a *fides implicita* as well as a *fides explicita*. There have been times in the Church's history when the Creed was a mere crystallised petri-

faction. The vitality had departed from it, and therefore it was not truth, but falsehood, for "truth is an ethical concept." At such times the true believer was the man who rejected all Creeds, in whose soul the *fides implicita* was so strong that he refused to accept a Creed which to him was the symbol, not of life but of death, not of purity but impurity, not of good but of evil. As he valued his own soul there was nothing for him but to fall back upon the throbbing life of the universe, to investigate his own experience, to question the God who is the inarticulate substratum of every human existence. Without the shelter for his naked soul that pious hands had wrought, he had to work with the material out of which such shelters are constructed. He had to fashion his own Creed in what was practically a creedless world. Little wonder that such Creeds have been imperfect, mere temporary make-shifts to cover the soul's nakedness. But the imperfection of these Creeds has only been in their articulate expression. The *fides implicita* has been all the stronger for its lack of outward support, and the strenuous struggles, the deep experiences—nay, the marvellous insight into the deeper workings of the human heart—of men of genius thus thrown upon their own



resources, rank high among the spiritual and intellectual treasures of the Christian Church. The Church of Christ bans none who in their inmost soul are struggling after the vision of God. Her claim is that she possesses the Light of God, that the experience of her saints, in all ages and in every land, gives her the practical assurance, which in this world is all we can ever have, that this Light is genuine and efficacious, and that no soul of man who honestly seeks the Light will, in God's good time, fail to reach the inner mystery which is the essence of her existence.



## CONCEPTION OF THE CHURCH



## IV

### CONCEPTION OF THE CHURCH

WHAT then is the organ of this “Semper, ubique, et ab omnibus”? How do we practically get at this objective content of Revelation which is the sum-total of the spiritual experience of humanity? And, having got it, how are we to apply it for the further enrichment of spiritual experience and for the development of humankind in its progress towards an ideal perfection? What, in short, is the meaning and function of the Church?

We must first consider current conceptions. The Church, according to one group of theologians, is a divine institution, founded by Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, who became Man “for us men and for our salvation,” and who, therefore, by reason of His twofold nature, sums up in His Person the totality of

all possible spiritual experience. The notes of this divine institution, the Church, are apostolicity, unity, catholicity, and sanctity. Jesus imparted His Holy Spirit to the Apostles, who were the first overseers of the Church, and from whom therefore all doctrine and all authority proceed. The Church is one and indivisible—one in Creed, one in government. The Church is Catholic as uniting in one visible institution all who directly feel the Spirit's influence, and as possessing actually or potentially the treasure-stores of the spiritual experience of all the saints of God. And, moreover, the Church is holy, as being the exclusive channel of the Spirit's direct influence, and thus alone holding the means of grace through which sanctity is attained, and as in actual fact having alone produced the saintly character in its distinctive manifestations. The Church is, therefore, by its very conception, an inspired body, the only infallible authority in doctrine, the only infallible guide in conduct. It is the body of which Christ is the Head, and through every member of which the Spirit of Christ is working. And this visible Church, thus defined, is what is known to the world as the Church of Rome, over which the Pope presides as the Vicar of Christ on earth, and

to which alone the historical succession can be clearly shown to belong.

But the impossibility of recognising the Church of Rome as the Visible Catholic Church has driven another group of theologians to take refuge in the conception of an Invisible Church, to which the promises of Christ were meant to apply.\* There are organised bodies of Christians on earth, but the Church of Christ is confined to none of them. The Church of Christ consists of all true believers throughout the world and is known to none save God. The Church of Christ has no definite material limitations of Creed or government. It is a spiritual body functioning in a spiritual world, and the influence of the Holy Spirit is a purely personal influence upon individuals, wholly independent of, nay, frequently ignoring, all materialistic channels whatsoever.

Such, then, are the two rival theories. I have stated them in their extreme forms as logical opposites, though it need scarcely be said that practically they are held with many modifications. But we cannot reason about them without some attempt at accurate definition. We must get down to the definite principle on which they are based. And when we do so

\* See Note H, "Westminster Confession on the Church."

we find that we are simply face to face with the antinomy, that runs through all life, of Collectivism and Individualism.

What are we to say then to the conception of the Visible Church on earth? In the first place we must repudiate the claim of Rome to the title. The Church of Rome has not an exclusive possession of the four notes by which she herself defines that Church which is the body of Christ. Only by subtle logical refinements can she even present a plausible case for herself. And yet it must be acknowledged that she stands in the direct line of the succession. She has had a marvellous development. The Church of the catacombs and the Church of the Vatican present few signs of identity to the outward observer. But the development has been a slow and gradual one, broken by no cataclysm sufficiently great seriously to interrupt the continuity of the process by changing the very nature of the institution. If we are not to find the Visible Catholic Church founded by the Apostles in Rome, we shall have some difficulty in finding it elsewhere.

Must we then hold by the theory of an Invisible Church? But that is to drop the idea of a Church altogether. An Invisible Church is a contradiction in terms. The Church, by



its apostolic definition, is the body of Christ, and an invisible body is an absurdity. Nay, further, an Invisible Church, consisting of men and women, individually under the Spirit's influence, but unknown, it may be, even to each other, lacks the very element which we conceive to be an essential characteristic of a Church, and is powerless to fulfil the function for which a Church exists. It has no inherent unity. It has no collective power. It furnishes the Holy Spirit with no effective instrument through which His energy can be directed against the evil that is in the world.

Now, in this dilemma the modern standpoint may help us, as it is to the modern world we appeal. Life is not static. It is a process—a continual movement—in which the ideal and the real are inextricably intermingled. The ideal is not only the goal to be aimed at, it is also the instrument by means of which the real is moulded to its ends, but in thus moulding it, it has to lose the completeness of its ideality and to be coloured by the material with which it works. It is a failure to distinguish between these two elements of human life that results in the interminable clash of warring forces through which humanity slowly progresses to the "one divine far-off event." One man takes

his stand upon the real and insists upon the recognition of facts. Another man has an inspired vision of the ideal, and in his impatience to clutch it refuses to see the stern barrier of fact that impedes his progress. And in the ordinary struggle of thoughts and ideas that constitute the political and religious atmosphere of an age, these two men are keenly opposed to each other, while as a matter of fact they are mutually complementary, and are simply part of Nature's dialectic through which she reaches her conclusions.

We must be careful not to lose the ideal of the Church as it was undoubtedly held by the Apostles. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all. But unto every one of you is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."\* That the Apostle Paul meant by the Church one great institution essentially governed from one central authority, but embracing every variety of spiritual temperament, every phase of faith, every gift of intellect and emotion, every shade of religious experience, all dominated by a common principle, is a

\* Eph. iv. 4-7.

fact that surely cannot be doubted. And in so far therefore as our Christianity falls short of this ideal we must acknowledge its imperfection, and we are bound to believe that on account of this failure of unity the Spirit's influence is restrained, and God is withholding rich blessings from us which otherwise would be ours. If the sin of the Church of Rome is that of blindly asserting a Catholicity to which she has no claim, the besetting sin of Protestantism has always been that of acquiescing in a divided state which is clearly contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and to the apostolic ideal.

We must maintain the ideal, but at the same time we must be true to the facts of life. The Church of Christ is not a visible Catholic unity, but in so far as it is true to its function it is ever striving, consciously or unconsciously, to reach forward to this consummation as the very essence and the true end of its existence. The Church of Christ is not as yet the Christ incarnate in a material organisation, but it is a continual process of incarnation. It is the Spirit of Christ—the Logos—striving amid incongruous elements to visualise Himself, and each of the *dissecta membra* of the body of Christ, in so far as it has in itself the Spirit's life, has an inherent impulse towards that

symmetrical form which will yet enshrine the One Spirit in one glorious body. This body of Christ is not an artificial thing that can be consciously constructed by an intellectual piecing of its several parts together. It is not a world-wide institution that is to be realised by the action of Synods and Councils, however Œcumenical, thinking out theological creeds, drawing up articles of agreement, making rules and decreeing forms of government. It is a living body, and its development must follow the laws of life. It is a spirit continually externalising itself, and the external form under the pressure of its environment must assume that appearance by which the spirit can best be interpreted to the world in which it lives.

And in this material world it is function that determines the form through which life is manifested. The evolutionary process consists in the adaptation of the primal energy to the peculiar functions of the specific organism. It is not otherwise with the Church. The development alike of its constitution and of its Creed was originally determined by its function. The Church as an institution was called into existence through the necessity of furnishing an outlet for Christian activity, and its Creed was fashioned by the necessity of interpreting

Christian experience. Neither constitution nor Creed, therefore, can be regarded as fixed, formed, and final, so long as the Church is a living body, pulsing with a full vitality. Crystallisation is a phenomenon of the inorganic world. Every living organism is in a state of continual change. It develops itself according to the law of its own existence, absorbing alien elements and transmuting them by the dominant principle that governs its growth, enlarging and even transforming its structure, to embrace and control all the rich variety of life it can assimilate with its own nature. But in so doing it never loses its identity. Its central principle is always the same. It is always a manifestation of the same life. It functions towards the realisation of the same end. And so must it be with that complex organism we call the Church. If it is really a living body, a vital organism, controlling the spiritual experience of an evolving humanity, it must be always in a state of flux. Its similitude is not that of a beautiful piece of statuary, carved by the deft hand of a consummate artist, embodying the perfect ideal of spiritual and physical beauty. It is rather that of the individual man, entering this tumultuous and perplexing world as a tiny infant, gradually de-

veloping all his powers and capacities, through the storm and stress of a rich and varied experience, till he attains to the full stature of manhood, and realises the ideal which was implicit within the feeble organism which first saw the light of day.

It may be said: "Does not such a view of the Church as this strike at the root of the very principle for which we are searching? We are looking for the seat of authority in religion. It is the voice of God we would hear telling us what we are to believe and do if we would fulfil the purpose of our existence. And how can a Church that is thus continually changing, and to the development alike of whose Creed and constitution no final limits can be set, assume this tone of authority? Are we not safer, on the whole, to fall back upon our individual spiritual intuition, the witness of the Holy Ghost within our own hearts, than to trust ourselves to such a vague authority as the apparently shifting and contradictory dicta that proceed from organised Christianity, which must, on the whole, under this theory, be identified with the Christian Church?" The difficulty is not to be lightly dismissed. But it is to be remarked that a developing Church is not by any means a shifting or capricious Church. We

are speaking of the Church as a living organism, whose constitution and whose Creed must continually develop if it is to correspond to the needs of a developing humanity. But development does not mean radical change. It does not mean that what is truth at one time ceases to be truth at another. It does not mean that one doctrine which suited its own generation and served as a working hypothesis to solve the difficulties of its time is dismissed for another which happens to fall in with the predominant tastes and passions of a new age. That is not evolution. In the development of life and thought, one solid fact realised is realised for ever; one spiritual truth clearly apprehended is never lost. But in the passage from age to age newly discovered facts must be fitted in to the old, so as to secure the due proportion and harmony of truth, and because spiritual truth is infinite, that portion of reality which humanity has inwrought with its very constitution serves only to enlarge its capacity for the absorption of still greater and sublimer truths. We progress not by rejecting but by accepting the highest results of the thought and experience of the past, and it is safe to say that no man can reveal to us any new spiritual truth which will be a *κρῆμα ἀεί* for humanity who has not ab-

sorbed the very spirit and essence of the whole doctrine of that Christian Church which in its Creed and constitution has been ever struggling to give adequate interpretation to the Christian consciousness. To hold by the theory of a progressive Church, instinctively adapting itself to its environment and eagerly welcoming all new light, is not, by any means, to be indefinite in one's theological beliefs, or to lack that strength of conviction which is needful for prompt and effective action.

But let the principle be always kept in view that it is function that determines form. For the question at once leaps to the lips: "What, in the present divided state of Christendom, are we to accept as the gathered results of spiritual experience as embodied in the Christian Church? Amid the vast multiplicity of beliefs claiming to be Christian, and the great variety of constitutions through which Christian activity is exercised, which are to be reckoned as in the legitimate line of evolution, and as therefore fitted to furnish a standpoint from which further permanent advance is to be made?" To the question as thus put there is no quite satisfactory answer. All the great divisions of Christendom, and many of the minor ones, have their historical justification. The student



of history sees that in the given circumstances they were inevitable, and were for the time the only method by which certain vital elements, the loss of which would have permanently stunted Christian life, could have been preserved. True, there was always another way out of the dilemma. There was a higher synthesis that would have reconciled conflicting antinomies, and bound the two divergent sections of the Church in a richer, fuller life. But it is given to mortals only to be wise after the event. We must adapt ourselves to God's methods of working out His own decrees, and if we would hasten the coming of His kingdom, we can only do so by a patient study of these methods, so that the final synthesis may be reached by quicker and milder processes.

If, then, we would follow God's way of evolution, the question we will first ask ourselves is not "Which is the true Church?" or "What beliefs are we to accept as the metaphysical basis of our religion?" It is rather, "What is the function of the Church, and how can she best fulfil that function?" The whole point of my contention is that the Church is not something blindly imposed upon man from without or from above, claiming to control his belief and to direct his conduct. The

Church springs from within as an inherent necessity of human nature. What, then, is that necessity? Why does the spiritual nature of man create this ecclesiastical environment? What called it into being, and what function has it to fulfil in the economy of human life? Clearly these are the questions that clamour for answer. To discuss the Creed and constitution of a great organisation without the clearest possible conception of the purpose for which it exists must, in the very nature of things, lead only to confusion.

The function of the Church can only be understood in the light of its history. The Church is an organic growth, each successive phase of its manifestation containing essentially all of permanent value that preceded that phase. It is not for us to-day to assign a function to the Church it never had before, and so to cut ourselves adrift from the stream of influence that has made us what we are. We cannot begin the life of humanity anew and create institutions which are to embody conceptions which are out of all relation with what men have previously believed. Attempts to do something like this have been made over and over again, but they have uniformly come to nothing. The stream of tendency that

constitutes the central principle of history has moved on its majestic course, has smoothed over the rough places of revolution, and simply absorbed any element of vitality it possessed into the great process of evolution which the theologian designates the eternal decree of Almighty God. If, then, we are to get a true notion of the function of the Church, we must consider the idea to which it owes its origin, the lines along which it has developed, and the end it has always proposed to itself.

We come back, then, to the idea of the Body of Christ, the materialised energy of God working through His Spirit, in the world of men. "Lo, I am with you alway," said Jesus to His disciples, and the fact became to them a living reality. The inherent necessity of human nature of which the Church is the visible result, is the influence of the Spirit upon the souls of men, stirring them into activity, and forcing them to realise all the best that is in their nature. It is only in community that this end can be realised, because the individual apart from the community is an inconceivable entity. The individual draws his life from the community, to whose life he contributes his own share. The larger, fuller, more varied is the life of the community, the richer does the

individual life become. For the common life is the life of God, manifested through His Spirit, and only restricted in the fulness of its flow by the creature's limitations of capacity for absorbing it. The Church, therefore, must represent the spiritual energy of humanity, organised for effective service. No doubt, we dare not deny, that there is much spiritual energy in the world apart from organised Christianity. But, in so far as it is inorganic, it is vague, inchoate, ineffective. It is, so to speak, the raw material, to be absorbed into the Church in the process of evolution, to be modified and transformed by the law of its developing life, and thus forced to yield its contribution to the spiritual effectiveness of the organic body.

The Church, as thus conceived, must embrace all the higher life of man. It is the home of the spirit. It is the centre to which all spiritual experience tends, and from whence all spiritual energy proceeds. In the Church, as an ideal organism, the subtlest and most perplexing spiritual emotions are understood, sympathised with, and interpreted. The deep despair of the soul in its failure to realise the visions of perfection that torment it, its remorse, its penitence, for the injuries inflicted upon its

own ideals, its sublime aspirations after a good it can only vaguely conceive, but which it feels it must grasp if life is to have any meaning—these must find their explanation in the light of that Revelation of Eternal Reality of which the Church, as possessing the totality of spiritual experience, ought always to be the custodian. Those spiritual emotions that alone give life its value, the love that joins heart to heart in mystic union, the thirst for knowledge in and for itself, the craving simply to understand the meaning of this marvellous universe, the intense desire to mingle with and lose oneself in the beauty and harmony that flood the soul through the avenues of eye and ear—these all seek their final satisfaction in the Church, for all these emotions are but spirit striving to realise itself and to enter into communion with that full, throbbing, spiritual vitality which is the universe of God.

And not only is it the case that this totality of spiritual emotion constitutes the Church, builds up its fabric, but the Church, thus constituted, evolves, stimulates, and controls the manifestation of this emotional life in humanity. The Church not merely organises the spontaneous manifestation of spiritual emotion, using the term in its widest sense.

It reacts upon that humanity through which the Spirit of God has built it up, and calls forth its latent possibilities. It is the source of spiritual energy. If its receptive function is to gather up and systematise spiritual experience, its active function is to create it. It acts as a constant stimulus to evolve the higher life of humanity. It fights against the mysterious evil that dogs the footsteps of men, paralysing their spiritual energies, perverting their religious instincts, polluting God's noblest gifts by turning them to vile and soul-destroying purposes. For, however we may theorise upon the subject, there is no denying the fact that the paths to heaven and to hell lie very close together. The noblest attributes of human nature are closely intertwined with the basest. The love of life, *e.g.*, an inevitable and primary instinct in every organised being, the root from which the noblest and most heroic ideals of humanity must grow, and which, therefore, should be as strong as a belief in the necessary Being of God, is perverted to a mere hard selfishness which can slaughter, without remorse of conscience, hecatombs of victims to maintain a gross carnal and sensual existence, which is not at all life. The love of man and woman,

a mystic passion even stronger than the love of life, for it is a passion meant to perpetuate the race of man upon the earth, is degraded into a brutalising lust which destroys the very capacity of emotion. The longing for the ideal beauty which finds expression in literature, art, music, architecture—harmonious forms through which the soul instinctively strives to enter into the larger harmony of the universe—is used to evoke the vilest passions and to minister to the lowest tastes. Even the thirst for knowledge can be similarly perverted, and an acuteness of intellect that can read Nature's secrets like an open book used merely to secure selfish gain and to advance personal ambition.

The Church, then, in the fulfilment of its active function, claims a creative and regulative influence on the whole of human life in its higher or spiritual aspect. It brings to bear upon the life of man those divine truths which have been evolved through the action of the Holy Spirit upon the spirit of man, which have been wrought out and systematised through the spiritual struggles and experiences of humanity. It claims to offer a theory of man's place in the universe, sufficient to enlighten him as to his origin, to explain the

significance of his spiritual struggles, to satisfy his legitimate aspirations, and to determine his future destiny.

It is not a theory that at any stage can be regarded as final and complete, for as it is the outcome of spiritual experience it must remain imperfect until the spiritual experience of humanity upon this planet is rounded off and ended. It is not a theory that can be expressed in rigorous scientific terms, for finite human reason by its very nature is incapable of grasping the infinite and reducing it to an exhaustive formula. It is not a theory that explains all difficulties, for no sooner has the spiritual insight of man seemed to penetrate one mystery, and to have seen along the lines in which it works itself out to intelligibility, than the unfathomable mystery of existence presents some fresh inexplicable phase. But it is a true theory, nevertheless—a theory that corresponds with reality and has received the verification of the intensest spiritual natures. It is a theory that works, nay, the only theory that on a large scale has ever been found to work. The basis of the theory is that man is an emanation of Deity—a child of God, possessing within himself something of the infinite nature of



God. Man is the manifold of which God is the unity, yet so that neither Creator nor creature loses any essential element of personality. The happiness of man consists in realising and expressing his unity with God. But the unity of spiritual beings must be unity realised in freedom. It is a unity of kindred natures seeking each other by an inherent law of their natures, not a unity that is forced on either by any external compulsion. Freedom must therefore involve in man an alternative, and the wrong alternative, yielded to, is sin. Man yields to temptation and thus severs himself from God, but not so that the spiritual link between them is altogether broken, the divine image in the soul completely erased. This would be to make a severance between Spirit and spirit that in the nature of things is impossible. God, the Absolute and Eternal, still works in humanity through the operation of His Spirit, and the whole tragedy of human life, its futile aspirations and its lamentable performances, are simply the perpetual struggle of the Eternal Spirit of God with the estranged will of man. And because the tendency of evil is always to grow worse, because the will once estranged tends ever to a wider cleav-

age, God intervened in the world of humanity to strengthen the spiritual bond between Creator and creation, and to startle His children into a loving submission, by showing the limitlessness of the law of sacrifice which is the law of the higher life. He became Incarnate in Jesus Christ. The Eternal Spirit of the Universe was made manifest in human form. The Highest Spiritual Being entered into the experiences of the lowest, that He might link all spiritual being in one golden chain, that He might show at once the unity of humanity and the higher unity of God and man. It was the enhancement of the Spirit's influence that had been working in the world since the creation. It was the inrush of a flood of spiritual life that permanently raised humanity to a nobler level. As we have seen, men received the new impetus as an intoxication of the spirit. The flood of new experiences threw their souls into so violent an emotion that it required time to think out their full implications and their value for the thought and life of coming generations. But it was done, and the great truths of the Triune God, the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the reconciliation between God and man effected through His

sacrifice, became the eternal possession of humanity.

It is to these primary truths the Church, which in these days we can only take as meaning organised Christianity, bears witness. These truths are the permanent theological gain she has reached through the soul struggles of the Christian centuries. I do not say the only permanent theological gain, but I would go so far as to assert the only indisputable gain, for whatever may be the ideas of individual men, the Church of Jesus Christ in all her severed branches, wherever she exists as an organised community, bears these truths on her forefront. The impotence of the struggle of Unitarianism to maintain a place in the legitimate succession, notwithstanding the great names that have lent lustre to its annals, is the best proof of my assertion. Unitarianism has never been a Church except when it approached so nearly to Trinitarianism as to be indistinguishable from it. At its best it has only been a semi-philosophical club.

These truths, then, must form the basis of all the higher life of man. The development of human faculty in all the rich variety of its expression must be simply the evolution

of the Christian idea, as formulated in the great dogmas of the Christian Church, through the medium of human personalities. It is not sufficient to say that the highest possible spiritual and intellectual life is quite compatible with a simple faith in the Christian Creed, as if the Christian Creed lay outside of a large field of legitimate human energy and was taken up as a mere by-product of human life. This is a tone that in current literature, and even in current apologetics, is very common. It is remarked that a man may be a great artist and yet for all that a sincere believer in Jesus Christ the Son of God. He may stand in the very front rank of scientists and yet remain a humble Christian. He may be a master of literary art and yet not find it necessary to renounce his faith. Christianity is not antagonistic to the arts and sciences, but may flourish alongside of them in all the dignity of its pure simplicity. We are all familiar with this method of argumentation, but surely when we think it over we must admit that it shows a lamentable lack of appreciation of the Christian idea. Either that idea is one that involves the whole of human life or it has no meaning at all.

The Christian verities constitute a philosophy of human existence. The claim of Christian dogma must logically be that it is a category exhausting all possible life-giving experience, and that human life can only be lived at its highest and best when it is evolving its implicit significance. The ascetic life so often identified with Christianity had at least a logical basis. The ascetic defines life in terms of a self-negation that excludes all pleasurable emotions that are dependent upon the material world. To him, literature, art, and science are not of the essence of life. They are temptations of the Evil One, attributes of that crude, inchoate, corrupt matter which it is the work of the spirit to subdue and annihilate. He lives his life therefore as a unity, introducing into it a rational principle. But the Christian who regards his religion as a thing by itself, a part of life which he is to keep separate from other parts, who considers business, art, literature, science, as quite legitimate pursuits, but in no way trenching upon his religious life, is irrational. His life is governed by no coherent principle. He is dominated by no one ideal sublimating his whole existence. Such phrases as "Business is business," "Art

for art's sake," "Literature is non-moral," "Science is the investigation of truth," have no meaning to the true thinker. Life is not a multiplicity of ends having no interconnection with each other. Human activities cannot go on their own way, each seeking its own end independently of every other, without defeating their own purpose. This pluralistic vision of life leads not only to irrelevancy and confusion in thought, but it has in practice in our day produced some of the most lop-sided individuals of whom history has any record. It has given us a Haeckel, who from the analysis of the laboratory has considered himself qualified to dogmatise on the raptures of the saints, and a Darwin, whose great intellect could spend whole days watching the motions of earthworms, while a play of Shakespeare became to him an utter weariness and a sonata of Beethoven as euphonious as a coalman's cry.

The Church therefore, if it is to be logical and consistent with its own ideals, must claim to dominate the whole of life. Its dogmas are the categories which indicate the lines along which alone spiritual excellence in all its various phases can be attained. The arts, the sciences, the emotions, the ethics of

life, are only on right lines of development, and only reach their natural culmination, when based on the postulates of the Christian faith. For the Church is the human spirit striving to attain to the measure of the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. The Church is the continuous effort of the Eternal Spirit of God to create in this material world a visible home for the spirit of man.

No doubt it is only the persistent striving of the Holy Spirit of God that is visible to human eyes. The Church is an ideal. When we descend to actual life we are bound to be envisaged with perplexities and anomalies in carrying out the ideal. But it must be remembered that we are only on right lines of development when the ideal is implicit in the real, and we can only discern the reality of our ideal when we note the tendencies of the human spirit in its evolution to its far-off goal.

Have we any right to say, then, that all that concerns the higher life of man only finds its true realisation when it is working itself out along the lines of the Christian conception of existence? Do the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement so interweave themselves with the

whole of life that literature, art, science and ethics, when they are at their best, when they are most fully expressive of the mystery of existence and touch the deepest springs of human vitality, are only the unfolding of their implications? Some might say that the very opposite is the case, that the arts and sciences have only really flourished when they have thrown off the domination of the Church and have divorced themselves from its narrow conceptions of life. The whole history of the Church, indeed, so far from being the history of the orderly evolution of human faculty, has been the history of the human spirit struggling for freedom of expression against the tyranny of ecclesiastical power. It is only at rare intervals that originality of thinking or expression has been fostered or even tolerated by the Church. The record of human progress is the story of the martyrs whose broken bones or whitened ashes have fertilised the soil that afterwards produced the richest and loveliest flowers of the human spirit.

There is an element of truth in this contention. The Church by its very nature is a conservative body, *i.e.*, it exists to conserve the gathered results of human experience and



to prevent them being scattered to the winds by any rash adventurer whose individuality is stronger than his wisdom. And yet such adventurers into the realms of the spirit have often been the very men who have wonderfully enriched this experience and added to the accumulating stores of spiritual wealth which the Church so jealously guards. The living visible Church is not an ideal institution. It is a militant body struggling forward to final victory, and in the hard campaign it is bound to make many mistakes and to expiate its sins by suffering grievous loss. The visible Church may at times be untrue to her principles, untrue to some at least of the conceptions on which her life is based, and may frequently give to principles that are perfectly right and just a wrong application. And when this is so it is the duty of those of her members who see her faults to endeavour to correct them, to recall her to a sense of her true function, to be the instruments through which the Eternal Spirit seeks to widen His influence and to diffuse His power.

The question is not whether the Church as a visible body has never made mistakes, has failed to recognise her friends, has even at times

retarded instead of fostering the growth of human faculty. It is rather, are the principles on which the Church is based the principles that make for human progress and enlightenment? Is the Church in its essence a progressive or an obscurantist body? Does the Church from its very nature, and in the best of its realised results, fall in line with the root idea of human development?

To answer such questions properly would be to trace the growth and development of the central thought enshrined in Christian doctrine through the whole history of the world, and then to determine its value in the education of the race. That we cannot do here; but surely there is material enough lying on the surface to show that such an investigation could have but one result. It is scarcely possible to overestimate, *e.g.*, the value of the Christian idea in the enrichment of literature. Literature is the artistic expression of life in language, and literature attains its noblest heights when it gives utterance to the deepest passions, the subtlest emotions, and the most soaring aspirations of strong natures, wrestling amid alien environments and antagonistic elemental forces for that unity with the Eternal Spirit of the Universe which alone

secures the peace that passeth understanding.\*

There are literatures other than Christian, but their greatness is just in proportion to their approach to the Christian solution of the riddle of the universe. It is this that gives to Greek literature that marvellous excellence and inherent vitality that have borne it through all the cataclysms of history, and constitute it still a living force in the spiritual unfolding of the modern world. Indeed, it may truly be said that Christianity is as much Greek as Hebrew. The two deepest and most vital streams of human experience and thought met and mingled in the early Church and moulded the whole course of modern civilisation. Hence comes our appreciation of the literature of those races whose spiritual life was the soul from which the Church grew.

And what a noble stream of literature has enriched the realm of thought from the days when the Synoptists penned their matchless portraiture of a perfect life in the pages of the Gospel! For centuries almost the only literature that had real artistic excellence was

\* Or maintaining their defiance when Omnipotence would crush their personal will.

that directly produced by the Church. And when in course of time literature sought a wider field and probed the human spirit with other than merely theological issues in view, it was still so interpenetrated with Christian ideas and Christian conceptions of life as to be unintelligible apart from them. Take away the Christian atmosphere from the noblest of modern literature, and have you not removed from it all that is vital? \* Where would the tragedy of Macbeth be, had Macbeth been a mere savage warrior whose lawless lusts and wild ambitions were his only law? The tragedy simply lies in this, that Shakespeare imports into Macbeth and his *entourage* the Christian ideal of life, and shows us their lawless lusts and wild ambitions struggling with those conceptions of the majesty of divine law, of sin, retribution, and expiation, which, inherent in the human soul, have been brought out and enshrined in the Christian Creed for the guidance of the human race. There is no tragedy in human life apart from the Christian ideal. Though the whole brute creation groaneth and travaileth in pain, it scarcely evokes a tear from the human eye or

\* Cf. Prof. C. C. Bradley's Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 88.

a sigh from the human heart. Were man but a curious organism thrown up by mysterious nature in the marvellous fecundity of her organic forms, doomed only to blossom and die like the leaves on the trees, his deepest anguish would hardly be worth a serious thought, for the scratch of a bare bodkin would end it. It is in the difference between the ideal and the real that the tragedy of life consists. It is the tragedy of immortal souls weltering in the mud and mire that would engulf them, and, were it possible, choke the very life out of them, that alone touches the deepest springs of emotion in the human heart. So truly is this the case that modern literature, with an intuitive grasp of what is necessary for its own sustenance, draws its most powerful effects from the artistic presentation of the clashing of Christian ideals with the natural corruption of the human heart. Even imaginative writers like George Eliot, who have thrown off their allegiance to the Christian Creed, cannot do without it in their art. Only when they are touching the primal verities of which Christian doctrine is the eternal witness do they produce anything that is vital and likely to be of permanent value.

And if literature attains to the summit of excellence only when it is permeated by the Christian idea, what shall we say of the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture? It has been said that art (using the term in its narrower sense) is the handmaid of religion. Art is very much more. Art is the shrine of religion. Art is the temple of the living God. Art everywhere owes its origin to the religious instinct. It is the attempt of the soul to express itself in terms of the loveliness and harmony of God's universe. Will any one deny that art has gained its greatest triumphs where it has simply been the medium for giving utterance to the soul's religious aspirations? The beauty of Greek architecture lies in its temples to the gods, the glory of Greek sculpture in its pure delineation of god-like forms, or in its efforts to depict the Nemesis that awaits the impious man and the evil-doer. Take from the art of the Christian centuries the Christian ideals, and have we anything left at all? The agony of the God-man, the glory of maternity in its noblest historic manifestation, the struggles of the soul with sin, the calm peacefulness of the saintly life, the great crises of life when the soul of man stands out in defiance of material power,

asserting its divinity against the onrush of an overwhelming fate—it is in depicting such subjects as these that art has reached the height of its glory. And what meaning has architecture for us apart from the Church? Is it possible to understand how the Christian religion touched the mediæval heart, soul, and mind without the study of mediæval architecture? Was ever a religion more nobly shrined? Who can stand in a great Gothic cathedral, with its marvellous combination of sublimity, dignity, harmony, loveliness, and grace, enfolding a mystery that seems to touch and yet elude our comprehension, charming the soul by its subtle suggestiveness and stilling it with the peace of eternity, without feeling that here art is fulfilling its perfect work in providing a fitting shrine for the worship of the Eternal Spirit? And yet, though as a matter of historic fact art reached its apex in interpreting Christian ideas, we are told that art has nothing to do with religion. Art is an end in itself. Art must be pursued for its own sake. What is the meaning of the phrase? If it means that art has laws of its own which must be obeyed before it becomes a material embodiment of spiritual ideas, then the assertion is a mere truism.

If this be all that is meant, we may as well say that literature exists for the sake of grammar and the alphabet. But if it means that it is the expression alone that has value for art, then the aphorism is entirely untrue. The subject glorifies the expression, makes it plastic to its touch. The realistic representation of the wagon of coals tumbled out on the road before my window may be excellently done, and may conform to all the rules of drawing and painting, but it is not art. At best it is only a letter of the alphabet of art. Art only begins when it is a tentative expression of the mystery of life, and it reaches its culmination when it endeavours to clothe with the garb of God's beauty the struggles and aspirations of the human soul towards the infinite perfection of its Maker.

Are we to maintain, then, that science—using the word in the narrower sense, as meaning the investigation of the laws that determine the material universe—is essentially religious? Must we hazard the bold statement that scientific research can only attain successful results when it accepts as axioms the dogmas of the Christian Church? Absurd. Surely this is the very height of obscurantism, and is to fly in the face of the most obvious



facts of history. Is the story of scientific research not simply the story of an age-long contest between science and religion, a contest in which the latter has in the long run been invariably worsted? Has not the Church obstructed every attempt to investigate natural law, and launched against the luckless investigator her supernatural terrors? Have not all those discoveries that have widened men's knowledge of the world in which they lived and improved their material condition been made in defiance of the Church, and mainly by men whom the Church has suspected, calumniated, and persecuted? And is not the extraordinary modern development of scientific discovery simply owing to the fact that, through the fuller enlightenment of humankind, the power of the Church has waned and her supernatural authority is no longer respected?

Let us think this matter out. If religion and science be irreconcilably divorced, the fault must be in the definition of terms. If truth and religion be not synonymous, then religion must go by the board. But the whole force of my contention throughout these lectures is that religion is a fact, a genuine experience, and that the theological formulæ in which

this experience has been enshrined are guaranteed by the consciousness of those whose experience they interpret. It is the part of the Church jealously to guard this deposit of truth, and in doing so we can scarcely wonder that she looks with suspicion upon theories and hypotheses that seem to conflict with it. I am holding a brief for no Infallible Church. It is not necessary for my position to maintain that the Church has never made any mistakes. She has had to hold the inner citadel of the Christian faith, and in doing so she has frequently entrenched herself by establishing outposts for the purpose of warding off attacks. In defending these outposts she has sometimes been defeated, as sometimes she has gained the day. But let it be remembered she has had to fight a real enemy—the real enemy not being science, but the unwarrantable intrusions of scientific adventurers. She has had her own body of doctrine to maintain, which she holds to be quite as scientific in the larger sense of the word, and to be based on principles as indefeasible, as the results even of the most exhaustive scrutiny of material phenomena. It is true she has fought with the weapons of her time—weapons sometimes crude and clumsy—and her

errors have always reacted disastrously on her own life. But in this respect she has been in no wise singular. The intolerance of an agnostic or atheistic philosophy would be hard to outrival. The point is, she has fought for a cause worth maintaining, for the preservation of an inestimable treasure fraught with unspeakable blessings to humanity. She has carried through centuries of barbarism, ignorance, and interminable strife, through periods of moral corruption, a false conceit of knowledge, and a perverse criticism, that sublime theory of life from which all the higher virtues spring which we owe to the teaching of Jesus Christ and those devoted disciples who, in the early centuries of our era, first felt the onrush of the Spirit's influence. And she is having her reward. The tendency of the best thinking of the present day is not to relegate her mysteries to the limbo of forgotten superstitions, but to recognise their profundity, to do justice to the great names that have been associated with them, to interpret their inner meaning and to recognise their overwhelming value in giving to individuals and to nations that moral uplift and spiritual outlook which exalt them in the scale of being. It is possible we may have to translate the ideas

enshrined in the Christian creed from the language of Greek philosophy to that of the common tongue, but who that studies modern literature and philosophy can fail to recognise the fact that their inherent vitality is dawning upon the human intellect with fresh force and vividness? They are the axioms of the spiritual life, and as such must lie at the basis of all life, and any scientific generalisation must be vitiated that fails to take account of them.

I must reserve the discussion of the relation between Christian ethics and dogmatics for fuller treatment than a paragraph at the end of a lecture. Meanwhile, let me briefly sum up. The Church, in its ideal, is a visible body, united and organic, the incarnation of the Spirit of Christ in a material world. The Church in its actuality, in the process of evolution, has become severed into sections, but in each vital section the Spirit is working, and each section, in so far as it is true to its function, retains the implicit ideal, and is striving, consciously or unconsciously, after that ultimate unity which alone can secure the fulness of the divine blessing. The function of the Church is the evolution of the spiritual man, which can only be done in community, for the indi-

vidual, severed from the community, is cut off from the influence of the Spirit, Who alone giveth life. The truths through which the Church evolves and trains spiritual faculty are those great doctrines, wrought out through the spiritual struggles of the early centuries, which are accepted by every one of its severed sections and have stood the test of time and experience, and these doctrines lie at the basis of the highest man has attained, or can attain, in every phase of the rich variety of his spiritual activity.



**THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF  
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**





## V

### THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

I HAVE tried to show that the postulates of the Christian faith which form the backbone of the Creed of Christendom constitute the root of the highest spiritual excellence in every sphere of the spirit's activity. This is inevitable if these postulates are true. The Christian Creed is an intellectual theory of the universe, and if it be true it must not only harmonise with the facts of life, but it must indicate the only lines along which the soul of man can attain the full fruition of his essential being. I am aware that in speaking of the spiritual activity of humankind as manifested in literature, art, and science, I have merely touched on their relation to Christian doctrine and pointed out the possibilities of a more exhaustive study. In dealing with ethics something more

than this must be done, for right living must always be the basis of the individual's practical activity. Matthew Arnold calculated that morality covers three-fourths of life, and, from his own point of view, everyone will admit that he was perfectly right. But, indeed, from the principles I am trying to unfold, this method of dividing life into compartments is a wholly erroneous one. Life ought to be a unity. The discordant life is an imperfect life, is an evil life. Life's various activities do not lie side by side unrelated. They grow out of one another, or they develop from the same stem. They are harmonised by a common vital bond. And if we are to speak of morality covering by far the greater part of human life, we merely mean that we are dealing in humanity with a phase of the one vital force that has a preponderant influence in determining the whole tone of the individual life.

My thesis, then, is that ethics is dependent for its noblest manifestations on the Christian Creed. Or, to put it more concretely, that no man can attain to the fairest flower of ethical living without being consciously influenced by the Christian theory of life. The Christian, when genuine to the heart's core of him, is the finest product of humanity, and is the natural

product of the metaphysical stem from whence he draws his essential life.

Now, the fact that there is any vital connection between ethics and theology is very frequently denied. Nay, even the more obvious relation between ethics and religion is often hotly contested. No less an authority than Newman Smyth says: "It would be idle now to think of forcing ethics back under the control of dogmatic theology."\* And yet that is just what I propose to do, nay, what I feel I must do, if I am to be true to my own Christian convictions. But let us, for clearness of thinking, define our terms. Let us be sure we understand the meaning of these three words, ethics, religion, theology, Ethics—from the Greek *ethos*—means no more than a man's manner of living—the manner of living he deliberately chooses. Religion is the appeal the universe makes to his emotional nature. Theology is the account given by the intellect of the meaning of that appeal. Is it possible, then, that there is no vital relation between these things? A man's ethics—if he be a rational creature, no matter how low his manner of living—must depend upon his implicit or explicit theory of life. The drunkard

\* See Note I, "The Relation between Ethics and Dogmatics."

who reels along the street with the far-off mystic gleam in his eye and the staggering gait that heeds no material barriers to its progress has *his* theory of life. He has his religion and he has his theology. The universe comes to him as an appeal to get away from the dark drudgery of a soulless life to the illimitable realm of the dimly descried ideal. But he knows that he is hemmed and pressed in by an inexorable fate, and there is only one narrow outlet through which he may enter for a time into the glorious realm of the gods. His ethos, therefore, is the passage through this particular aperture. His life is severely logical. Theology, religion, and ethics form one complete whole. He may never personally have worked his system out, but it has been worked out and enshrined in imperishable verse from Anacreon to Omar Khayyam.\* His system is so complete that he is impervious to your attacks unless you can approach him on metaphysical lines and convince him that you have a theology purer and nobler than his. You must, in short, change his theory of life if you would effectually change his practice.

As, then, there are different theories of life, so there are different codes of ethics. Atheism,

\* See Note J, "Hedonism,"

pantheism, deism, Christianity, each has a different outlook upon life, and there is a logical ethos attached to each. Were men logical and were their practice strictly dependent upon their theory, it would be possible always to determine their religion and their theology from their manner of living. But men are never consistent. As a matter of fact we acquire our ethical standards experimentally. We act before we form theories of acting, and our actions, in the first instance, are rarely the result of conscious theories. They proceed from a vast variety of motives, from an intermingling of metaphysical theories, from a continual play of rival forces impinging upon the will. We are dependent in our main tendencies upon that essential nature we acquire through heredity, which is the result of the accumulated energies of a long line of ancestors. We are the creatures of circumstance and environment, which create for us a conventional morality to which we almost unconsciously adhere. But we are not to take for granted this ethical life of convention as the true ethos. We are not rationally permitted to take things as they are and ethical standards as they happen to exist in our own particular environment, and lay down these as the moral law to which others are to con-

form and into which we are to train our children. To do so is to strike at the very root of any idea of an absolute in morality. If we take our moral code merely empirically, the drunkard and the sensualist have as much a right to their ethical ideas as has the pious Christian. The moment we get out of ourselves and ask why we are to persuade another man to act as we are doing, and why we are to educate our youth into our own conventional ideas of morality—that moment we are forced to pause and consider, in order to discover some sanction that will prove our ethical ideas right. Hence the imperative need for a philosophy of morals, for a theory of life. We require this philosophy of morals in the first place to justify our own conduct, and when we have found and accepted it, we find it inevitably reacts on our own conduct and goes a long way to determine our future practice. We acquire a stable basis of morals, and an objective standard according to which we assume the right of judging of the actions of others.

This account of the historical relation between the philosophy and practice of morals explains the frequent anomalies we find in the ethical realm. It is sometimes observed that a man's practice is better than his Creed.

Naturally, because a man acts before he thinks ; his actions are the result of his primitive instincts modifying and being modified by his environments. But man has become a highly civilised being, performing a vast variety of complex actions under the influence of many motives, before he dreams of consciously putting to himself the question as to why he deems certain actions right and others wrong. And when he does ask the question and rises to some kind of ethical metaphysical theory, his theory may be narrower than his conduct and may not cover all the actions he instinctively performs. And yet, the theory being his own, he has a natural love for it, and he simply takes for granted that were it adequately investigated it would be sufficient for its purpose. There is nothing more common, *e.g.*, in ethical discussion than to assume certain ethical ideas which have been ratified by the human consciousness as pure and noble, and which must therefore be accepted, to be the gradual evolution of principles of action that could not possibly have produced them. Even the Sermon on the Mount, the most intensely theological of all ethical codes, has been claimed as the natural and inevitable product of agnosticism.

We may adopt a purely naturalistic outlook upon the universe. Matter and physical force are the only realities. Spirit is a mere illusion, an intangible something which is nothing at all, as a more searching analysis can always construe it in terms of material energy. The life of the universe is a mere blind force, working itself out in accordance with determinate laws, and throwing up in the seething ferment a vast variety of organic forms, which live their little day only to be once more absorbed in the general mass, to form the crude substance from which still other and more complex organisms are to be evolved. Man as he is to-day upon this planet, with all his marvellous complexity of body, soul, and spirit, is simply the highest and most intricate structure which Nature in her blind evolution has as yet produced, but in his purposelessness and in his evanescence he differs in no respect from other organic bodies.

What, according to this theory, must his ethics be? True, in strict logic, he can have no ethics, for he has no free-will, no choice. He is simply a link in Nature's chain. He is simply the result of Nature's forces weaving and unweaving the web of material being, and he has no more say in the pattern that



is to be woven than the thread that constitutes the warp and woof of the cloth. But passing over the initial illogicality of ascribing ethical relationships to such a being, and taking, as is usually done, the illusion of free-will for the thing itself, how shall we define the ethics that such a theory of existence must produce? Clearly the ethos of such an organic structure as man is here described to be must be simply a materialistic utilitarianism. He fulfils the law of his nature when he gives a free rein to his most clamant impulses. He is at one with his universe when he allows the natural forces that are working in his personality to have absolute scope and then falls back when they are exhausted to permit the material atoms of which his body is composed to fertilise the soil from whence he sprang. Spirit being a mere illusion, all those higher ideals of life and duty which can only have significance if spirit be real, must be dreams and phantoms in which no sane man would care to dwell. The ethics of naturalism can never be aught else than a continuous striving after the crudest sensual enjoyment.

And yet a naturalistic utilitarianism has been and is the ethical theory of many men of high moral tone who have sought to find a logical

vindication for their position. They have argued that, although in the first instance, no doubt, man was merely an impulsive savage, knowing no higher law than the gratification of his five senses, yet a little experience soon convinced him that without the exercise of some self-control he could not even attain to this gratification. Living in a world of other personalities each eager to give scope to his sensual appetites, some compromise had to be made before, in the general conflict that was bound to ensue, the whole race of man was swept from the face of the earth. Self-control, essential for the life of the community, was thus forced upon the individual, and, inwoven with the tissue of each generation, gradually became a habit. Men learned to take long views and to sacrifice a lesser pleasure in order to secure a greater. In this way qualitative standards took the place of quantitative, and those actions which were of service to the community rather than to the individual had a moral value assigned to them and were made the object of praise.

But, surely, it is evident that the element of quality is introduced here by an illicit process. Utilitarianism has a materialistic background. The utility that is made the standard of morals

is merely the utility of personal advantage. In the last resort it reduces itself to the best method of gratifying a man's natural appetites. We are not permitted to construe the world in terms of materialism and to banish God from the universe, and then take a surreptitious and quite illegitimate leap into the spiritual realm. Materialism leaves no logical ground for disinterestedness, for heroism, for sacrificing oneself to the good of the community. You may, from the naturalistic point of view, convince a man that he cannot attain to the ideal of the natural life without the exercise of considerable self-control, that it is an exceedingly foolish thing to be a gross sensualist or a depraved drunkard, though even this must be allowed to remain a matter of opinion. Still, it is possible to raise a man from these lower levels of pleasure to that refined Epicureanism where the senses are sublimated and their concentrated essence gives a rich and rare flavour to a life of culture. Higher than that you can never raise him. He begins as a sensualist and as a sensualist, logically, he ends, and not all the straining of this gross matter, which alone he acknowledges as real, through logical sieves, will produce that essential nobility of life which can only be vindicated on a totally

different theory. If utility, in this material sense, be the origin, basis, and sanction of morals, it must remain its criterion to the end, and you cannot possibly convince a man, who sees his way to a personal advantage which he strongly desires through means which the moral instincts of his fellow-men condemn, that he is wrong in using these means simply because his action would be injurious to his neighbour. He listens to your appeal, if he listens at all, because he has within his own heart an implicit standard of conduct which came from quite another source. The Creed of the materialist has been thus summed up by one of the characters of a popular novelist, and it would be difficult to shake the logicity of his position: "I believe that life is a mess. It is like yeast, a ferment, a thing that may move for a minute, an hour, a year or a hundred years, but that in the end will cease to move. The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strongest the weak, that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all. . . . Life, bah! It has no value. Of cheap things it is the cheapest. Everywhere it goes begging. Nature spills it out with a lavish hand. Where there is room for one

life she sows a thousand lives, and it's life eat life, till the strongest and most piggish life is left." \*

Again, we may adopt a spiritualistic outlook upon the universe. We may define the totality of existence in terms of spirit rather than of matter and force. It is spirit of which alone we are immediately conscious. This gross matter which seems to press and hem us in on every side is merely an inference from the fact of consciousness—a fact of which matter can give no rational account. It is matter that is the illusion therefore and spirit that is the reality. The universe is spiritual. Absolute Being is God, the One and Eternal. Of this Absolute Being, however, we can predicate nothing that is strictly intelligible to our finite faculties. Personality is too low a category for this sum-total of existence, and personality, as a permanent fact, is too large an ideal for that infinitesimal portion of infinite being which is included in a human individuality. This seems to be the pantheistic attitude which has such a hold on so many genuinely spiritual natures. It has something sublime and attractive in it, but also something so illusive and intangible that it is difficult to grasp it as a definite Creed. It

\* "The Sea-wolf," by Jack London.

shrinks from making affirmations about the Absolute which appeal to us as distinctly personal beings to whom the not-ourselves can only be intelligible when strained through our personality. It dissolves the individual, swallowing up his personality in one vast spiritual substance. This spiritual substance is, indeed, vital, manifesting itself continually in finite forms, pouring out the richness of its essential nature not only in the beauty of organic structures, but in the highest products of the human mind. It is working to some great ideal. The tendencies that point out the direction in which it is moving are clear and distinct. But it works out the inner purpose of its being through all those discords and jarring dissonances which constitute the pain and sorrow and sin of humanity. And yet these are parts of itself, necessary movements in the divine life, for God is all, and there is nothing in the universe that is unrelated to the Absolute Being.

Now what shall we say of the influence on ethics of such a theory as this? To what ethos does it logically lead? It has undoubtedly this merit, that it affords a logical basis for all those qualities of human nature which we are constrained by an inner necessity to believe are of the higher and nobler order. Spirit is real, and

the attributes of spirit are no mere illusions. We can be certain that we are only living out our lives when we are giving scope to those disinterested emotions which excite the admiration and prompt the emulation of humankind. Pantheism finds room for, and supplies a vindication of, all the great heroisms of life, the duty nobly done, the evil stoutly resisted, the burden patiently borne, the love that is stronger than death. All are but manifestations of that one substance which is God, whose essential nature is ineffable and subject to no finite affirmations, but of which the thoughts and actions of men are the phenomenal sparkle and froth that bubble up from inmost depths to the surface.

But if this can be said of those manifestations of the divine life in humanity which we instinctively praise and regard as good, must not the same be affirmed of those we blame and stigmatise as evil? What are we, mere transient bubbles welling up from the unfathomable abyss of Being, that we should criticise any of the methods by which Being issues into the realm of the phenomenal? God is all. The seen and temporal is but the outer garb with which He or It clothes Himself or Itself. Nature is but the fringe of His raiment. Humanity is of the texture of the stuff. It is not for us to quarrel

with the pattern, but rather to take it with all its manifold hues in its picturesque beauty. The sweet sylvan scene, the broad river flowing through the rich champaign in silent majesty, the fertile fields yellow with their luxuriant harvest, the stately trees whose foliage droops to the earth in graceful curves—this is God manifest to the seeing eye and understanding soul, God providing for the needs of His children, filling their hearts with food and gladness. But the wild tempestuous sea on the dangerous reef, the storm-wind shattering the vessel, freighted with precious human lives, against the breakers, the life-boat manned by heroic devotion speeding to their rescue and tip-tilted by the mere fluff of the spray of a mighty billow, the broken hearts of toiling women, the despair of starving children—this also is God, making the winds His chariots and the flaming fire His messengers. The saint, pure of soul, his heart one passion of love for sinning, sorrowing humanity, toiling day after day amid sorrow, disease, and filth, if only he might bring one ray of the heavenly light into the dark abyss of human degradation, and dying at his post with the ecstasy of the beatific vision illumining his eyes—this is God, bursting into phenomenal life from the inner



recesses of His being. But the sinner, corrupt of heart, brutal in his crude self-seeking, haunting, through an unholy love of them, the dens of infamy and vice—this also is God, for God is All and the universe is one, and the manifold of the phenomenal is embraced in the one Absolute Existence. In short, Jesus of Nazareth, dying on the cross a death of lingering agony in expiation of the sins of humanity, and thus revealing the infinite possibilities of a limitless love, is truly God. The whole fulness of the Godhead pours through this manifestation of the divine essence.\* But Nero, on the throne of the Cæsars, an Incarnation of the Spirit of Evil, devoting the whole force of his vitality to fathom the unfathomable possibilities of cruelty and vice—he also is God, for he is quite as real and even typical a manifestation of the manifold fact of the universe.

Now it must be apparent that such a theory of life cannot fail to blur the outlines of moral distinctions. It leaves no room for personality, a personal will, the sense of responsibility, the conviction of sin. It undoubtedly tends to create a wide and general sympathy alike with

\* "The whole fulness of the Godhead." We must always beware of orthodox phrases when they are merely meant to cover a pantheistic philosophy.

nature and human life, and this is an element of good that is in it, because any theory that is sound must bring the isolated individual into oneness with universal being. It is this sympathetic insight into the facts of existence that commends the pantheistic attitude to the literary artist. As a sentiment rather than a reasoned-out theory it forms the background of much of the imaginative literature of the day. And this is just one of the reasons why our current literature never rises into greatness. The truly great artists have always been men who have so interpreted human nature as to show us man, by the force of his inherent personality, rebelling against and breaking through the meshes of heredity and environment that would swallow him up, and asserting himself as an initial force in the universe. But the literature of to-day is struck in a minor key because it is entangled in the fatalism of materialistic or pantheistic theories. For if materialism has no real uplifting power, pantheism has very little. It justifies the saint indeed, but it leaves him severely alone. If the eternal Substance chooses to manifest itself in deeds of heroism and devotion, in a pure literature and a noble art, we can look on and admire. There is in such manifestations a picturesque beauty that appeals to

the soul. But if it manifests itself in deeds of infamy and horrid cruelty, we can still look on and shudder. There is a certain fascination in the horrible to which our instincts respond. And this large tolerance of all forms of vital manifestation dulls the edge of conscience. After all, if we have not a clear-cut conception of the persistence of personality, the æsthetic interest of life must dominate the moral. If God be not a definite Personality our oneness with the universe can never be a strong emotion. It must be at best what Spinoza calls "an intellectual love," which is a very platonic affection indeed. And if man's personality be a mere illusion having in it no element of permanence or initiative, how is it possible to work up any enthusiasm for great causes or any passionate love for one's fellow-creatures? How am I, in a mere transient and phenomenal world, to discriminate between great and small causes, and why should I do anything to promote either the one or the other? Let the God who is All, the cause of Himself as of all else, look after His own causes. Why should I make myself unhappy over the woes of others? What are blighted lives, broken hearts, mortal agonies to me? I surely cannot be expected to sentimentalise

very much over them, when I know that a small dose of laudanum would heal them all—heal them much more effectually than any self-devotion of mine could do, by bursting the phenomenal bubble and sending back its elements to the abyss of Being. If the essential Substance, in the mystery of its working, has cleared my eyes from the mists of passion and superstition, initiated me into its inner secrets, and made me a conscious spectator of the thrilling but illusive drama of life, let me lean back upon my fauteuil, adjust my opera-glasses, and take an æsthetic delight in the complicated mechanism of the play. Ah! the curtain falls. I step out into the vast beyond. Once more I am in the abyss of Being. I cease to be a *person*, and what matters anything to me?

But, again, we may have a deistical outlook upon the universe. There is a God—a Personal Being—who acts, thinks, and loves. There are immaterial souls, and there is a material organic system of things which He has created. God has existed from all eternity. Creation has come into being in time. God rules the material order by fixed laws which He has imposed upon creation as an inventor regulates the machine he has constructed. God governs the realm of angels and of men by

precepts and ordinances which they must obey at their peril. God and His material creation are not one thing, but two. God transcends His creation, and communicates with it by means of messengers whom He sends to make known His will. These messengers may be either the select souls of the race to whom has been given the faculty of reading God's will in His works, or they may be men to whom He has made a special revelation, which has been authenticated by signs and miracles.

The deistic attitude towards the problem of the universe, as a reasoned-out and quasi-philosophical system, is practically a thing of the past. The Unitarian of to-day dwells more upon the immanence than the transcendence of God, and is inclined to pantheism rather than deism. But the deistic attitude still dominates much of our orthodox belief. To the man in the street—that powerful individual who has emerged in our day from an unmerited obscurity—God is still the “big non-natural man in the next street,” who lives, in lonely majesty, apart from His own creation. It is this God Who is the object of the attack of popular infidelity. The anti-Christian controversialist, when he has disposed of Him to his own satisfaction, finds it difficult to under-

stand why Christians should still hold by their Creed, except through sheer stupid perversity. And it is just this difference of standpoint that makes it so difficult to-day for the cultured preacher to make a clear appeal to many of those whom he is addressing. He has been educated to conceive God and to interpret the Christian Creed in terms of a spiritualistic philosophy, while his hearers are still under the dominion of a deistic theology which isolates God from the human soul and apprehends the leading ideas of Christian doctrine as an *opus operatum* instead of an *opus operantem*. God stands apart from the human soul. The Trinity is a curious arithmetic puzzle located somewhere far away in the abyss of space. The Atonement was a deed done once for all, the handing over to a scrupulous Master the mathematically exact equivalent for the ransom of human souls. Christian doctrine, in short, consists of a few irrational propositions which are to be apprehended by simple faith if they are apprehended at all.

Now, the essence of this whole attitude to the universe lies in its outwardness. Life is a period of probation, and human beings, in their passage from the cradle to the grave,

are under the guidance of a probation officer. Rewards and punishments will be meted out to every soul of man when the judgment day arrives, in the same arbitrary method as they are by human judges on earth. It matters not whether those who adopt this outlook upon life are heterodox or orthodox, whether they are Unitarian or Trinitarian, their essential Creed is practically the same, and the ethos that springs from it is identical. It is an ethos inspired by hope of reward and fear of punishment. The reward of the good life, the punishment of the evil life, both lie in the far future. The Atonement, when it does come as a modifying influence upon conduct, remains a mere episode. It is a mechanical contrivance for lifting from the soul of man a grievous and intolerable burden which prevented him entering the lists with any hope of success. It gives him a new start and makes it possible for him, under better guidance, to achieve the reward of victory.

But it is evident that such an ethos as this can never raise men to the higher levels of life. It has this merit, that it keeps moral distinctions clear. It has a definite code of acts that are right and acts that are wrong, and it begets and inculcates in the soul a

lively sense of their wise and foolish nature inasmuch as they lead respectively to joyful or painful experiences. As a method of moral education it has sometimes its uses, but it affords no rational basis for ethical living. Morality must always remain an arbitrary thing, not a natural outgrowth of the essential being of man. Good and evil are qualities imposed on actions by the fiat of Omnipotence, not qualities inherent in their nature. The moral code becomes a legal code, and we learn goodness by a careful study of the documents, and the measure of our merit is the closeness of our approximation to an outward standard. But such a conception of ethics as this can give us nothing but a hard, dry, and Pharisaic life. It can take no account of those inner springs of motive that constitute the psychical man. It judges the act, not the source of the act. It tends to ignore alike that curious complexity of inward impulses and variety of outward environments that impinge upon the will. It leaves no room for those finer shades of sympathy and emotion that characterise the same act, diminishing or enhancing its ethical significance. At best it can only cultivate the sterner virtues of life, those that are most patent and obvious. It is fatal to the



delicate tints of that rich bloom into which the ethical life is meant to blossom, for it has always the hard lines and crude colouring of an artificial product, and never the elastic strength and soft loveliness of a full-throbbing life.

But now what of the Christian ethos? As a matter of historical fact few to-day would venture to deny its peerless supremacy. We find it in the Gospels, not only enshrined in precepts that are perfect gems of limpid thought and expression, but actually lived out in the wonderful life of Jesus of Nazareth. There are few who would arraign the beauty of the Sermon on the Mount or deny that a life lived on the spiritual plane from whence it proceeds would be the life of a perfect human being. We are content to have it held up as the standard of ethical living. It is the ideal towards which men and women ought to be ever approaching. It lays down the principles that must underlie all ethical teaching.

This is almost \* universally admitted. But it is frequently said, "The Gospel is ethical, not metaphysical. The Sermon on the Mount is a beautiful code of morals, not a theory of the universe. And the Church has chosen to lose

\* We cannot quite overlook Nietzsche and his Superman.

herself in the mist of metaphysics instead of cleaving to the pure morality of Jesus of Nazareth. She has constructed an elaborate theology full of confusing and conflicting statements, which has served no other purpose than that of hardening men's hearts and blinding their vision to the simple loveliness of the ethic of Jesus, to which the soul of man instinctively responds. We are too heavily freighted with the lumber of obsolete metaphysical systems. They are obscuring the beatific vision. Let us throw them overboard and unite simply on the ethical basis of the Sermon on the Mount."

Is this a just criticism? Have we here an ethos that has no metaphysical basis, no *rationale*, no root in a distinct conception of the universe? If this be so, then I say emphatically, however beautiful it may be, it is but "the baseless fabric of a vision," a dream of the night which must fade away the moment we awaken to the stern reality of life. It may do well enough for you as an individual if you choose to live in the land of visions, but you have no moral right whatever to impose it upon me, who would live in the realm of reality. But it is not so.

The metaphysical implications of Gospel ethics

are not difficult to discern, and, as a matter of fact, they began to be evolved so soon as the Church found it necessary to give an intellectual statement of its position. The central feature of the teaching of Jesus is that it admits of no compromise. It is an absolute morality. Its very essence is stated in the words "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Is this ethics or metaphysics? It is both, and both are so closely intertwined as to be inseparable. Why should we hold this ideal of perfection before ourselves? After all, is there not a sense in which it can be said that we are already perfect and there is therefore no use for further striving? We are a part of God's universe, carrying out God's perfect will by an inherent necessity of our nature. Whatever is, is right. It is just in that place where it needs to be if there is any harmony or purpose in the universe at all. Why should we try to be other than we are? Why should we aim at what Jesus means by perfection? Because, Jesus says, your Father in heaven is perfect. But here is a profoundly metaphysical statement and also a most satisfactory reason for our striving after perfection. It is a personal perfection we are actively to work for, not merely the unconscious perfection of a part in

a symmetrical whole in which we must acquiesce. God is a Person—the Father in heaven—and our perfection is to be like His, the perfection of a self-conscious, reasoning, emotional, willing being. We must therefore, if we are to accept the ethic of Jesus, discard all materialistic and pantheistic theories. These can give us no reason for striving after perfection. These logically involve us in a will-less fatalism. But the theory of Jesus can. God is a perfect Being—perfect as we conceive perfection—and our perfection is to be similar to the perfection of God. Nay, further, the relation of God to us is not the relation of a Sovereign Lawgiver to His subjects. And this strikes at the root of the deistic position. It is that of a Father to His children. It is, therefore, quite true, as the pantheist says, that we are part of God. We inherit His nature. We are of the substance of the Eternal Spirit. But our personality is never merged in the universal being. It remains clear and distinct. The perfection after which we are to strive is an attribute of our personality, just as the perfection of God is an attribute of His Personality. The category of Personality is higher than the attribute of perfection. Our perfection does not make us God, does not make us lose our individual being

in the being of God. Indeed, the more perfect we become, the more intense grows our personality. For we grow liker God in all the characteristics of spiritual being.

So, then, taking only one precept from the Sermon on the Mount, we find that so far from being simply ethical it is intensely metaphysical, and that apart from metaphysics it has absolutely no meaning. Were we to take the beatitudes in detail, we should find in them the whole of mystical theology.

The striking feature of Christian morality, I repeat, is its absoluteness. It admits of no compromise. Every spiritual being ought to strive after perfection. But "perfection" is an empty word till we give it ethical content. What, then, is the ethical perfection after which we, as spiritual beings, should strive? That must be determined by our essential nature. What is the nature of spirit, human or divine, as a vital force? In the ethic of the Gospel we are taught that spirit ought to be continually going out of itself, losing itself, in order to enrich itself. The totality of spiritual Being is not an impersonal, unconscious substance which bursts forth into diseased personal units of consciousness like the pustules on a small-pox patient, disappearing with re-

turning health. The totality of Being is contained in the consciousness of a Personal God, the All-embracing, the All-sustaining. Nothing exists of which there is no consciousness, for God is conscious of Himself. Each finite personality derives its existence from God and has in God a vital connection with every other. Its life consists in enlarging the boundaries of its personality so as to embrace the widest range of life-giving experience. Hence its ethos lies in a universal sympathy, in a love for all life, in a willingness to range through the whole realm of individual experiences that it may return to itself enriched with the spoils of its ventures. The life of narrow self-isolation is the death of the spiritual life. The life of self-abnegation for the sake of others results in a fulness of experience and an enrichment of faculty which is an ample reward for the immediate sacrifice. Hence the ethical precepts of the Gospel logically follow. We are to do to others as we would have others do to us, for only thus will their hearts open to us and admit us to the inner sanctuary of their experience. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant."\* So Jesus says, because the largest service rendered to our

\* St. Matt. xx. 27.

fellow-creatures brings them into the closest sympathetic union with ourselves. The only joy for a human being is the joy of fellowship, and the wider the fellowship the more intense is the resultant blessedness. There is no such thing as an individual joy, an unshared joy. The joy emerges with spiritual contact. Hence the virtues of the Christian life are all social virtues. Not one of them is conceivable for a self-centred individuality. Virtue consists in losing oneself in the life of others, blessedness in sharing the life of God, which is the spiritual substratum of each individual existence. "Blessed is he who loveth Thee, O Lord, and his friend in Thee and his enemy for Thee. For he alone loses none dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost."\*

And this going forth from itself which is the life of the finite spirit, and in which it finds its true ethos, is a characteristic of spirit *per se*. It is a characteristic of the Infinite Spirit as well as the finite, of God as well as of man. The crux of all theistic systems has invariably lain in the difficulty of passing from the Infinite to the finite, from the One to the many. The Absolute must dwell in unconscious majesty so long as nothing exists but itself, for self-

\* St. Augustine, "Confessions," bk. iv. par. 9.

consciousness only arises when the Other comes into being. But in the Christian theology God is not a simple but a complex Being, and that complexity has marked His inner essence from all eternity. God did not begin to be a Father when finite human beings first emerged upon the field of time. Fatherhood is of the essence of His nature, and so also, therefore, is Sonship. The Eternal Father has as its implication the Eternal Son. And that going forth from itself which is the very life of spirit and in which spirit finds its blessedness must also be an eternal process. But it is more than a process. Spirit not only goes forth, but remains. It is not lost or merged in other existences. It loses itself to find itself. God, therefore, can only realise Himself in a threefold manifestation. But these three manifestations, while being Himself, must in a certain sense be other than Himself. They must have a separate personality: otherwise God's self-consciousness can only be an uneasy dream. The doctrine of the Trinity is a metaphysical conception, but it is a metaphysic that is essentially ethical. It is a metaphysic that is necessary to account for the ethical process, to give absoluteness to the ethics of the Gospel. If right, truth, harmony, love, sympathy be eternal realities inwoven



with the very nature of existence, then they must be in God just what they are in man, and God from all eternity must have had scope for exercising them. God must have loved the Son from eternity with a limitless love, and the Holy Spirit must have proceeded from the Father and the Son to enfold the Blessed Three in the highest and most perfect union. This is the solution offered by the Church of the central problem of metaphysics. It is essentially an ethical solution, and moreover it has never been offered as a final and exhaustive explanation of the riddle of the universe, but simply as an adumbration of the metaphysical basis which alone will give sanction to the Gospel ethic. It remains the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.

But the fact of the Trinity must embrace all spiritual being. The essence of spirit is that while it retains its individual personality it goes forth on a mission of limitless love to enrich itself with the experiences of all spiritual existences. The eternal love must be manifested in space and time that it may embrace those whose self-consciousness realises itself under material conditions. Hence the story of Calvary. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever

believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." \* It is self-abnegation carried to its utmost conceivable limit in order to obtain the fullest spiritual enrichment. The central fact of the Gospel loses its entire interest and meaning for religion if Jesus be not "He in whom the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells." † The Cross is the ethical Absolute construed in temporal and spatial terms. It is the meaning of the Trinity translated to suit the conditions of finite spiritual beings struggling in a world oppressed with the mystery of evil. The evil is self, the good is selflessness. The loss is the indulgence of carnal appetite, the gain is the outflowing of the spirit into spirits of similar texture, the sorrow is the desolation of a spirit that has no helper, the joy is the fuller life that comes from an all-embracing sympathy.

Thus, then, the Christian theory of the universe has its own distinctive ethos. Metaphysic and ethic are interwoven into one symmetrical whole. The ethic is the implicit metaphysic. The metaphysic is the explicit ethic. It is a well-recognised fact that Christianity discovered the individual, but it is scarcely sufficiently realised how very profound is this

\* St. John iii. 16.

† Col. ii. 9.

truth. Insistence upon personality is the keynote of the Christian system. Personality is the fundamental basis of life. All true living results from the contact of personalities. Even in the economy of the Godhead, God only realises Himself through His threefold Personality. But personality is not isolation. Self-abnegation is not the abandonment of self but its enrichment. The wider the range of personal experience the individual can incorporate with his own, the fuller and the more intense does his personality become. There is not one single precept of Christian ethics that does not result from its central principle and does not find its only sanction in its metaphysical basis.

In face, then, of my main contention in this lecture, what are we to say of the persistent attempt that is being made nowadays to divorce ethics from metaphysics, *i.e.*, to divorce morality from all positive religion whatever? Surely it is the most extraordinary dream that ever entered the mind of thinking man. Surely it must be evident that a man's manner of living must depend upon his theory of life, and his theory of life is his theology. It is no more possible to teach ethics without religion than to teach practical engineering without imparting a thorough grounding in statics and

dynamics. But, it is said, the rules of ethical living are acquired empirically. They have been beaten out by the hard and bitter experience of untold centuries of human experience. There are certain great principles on which all serious-minded men are agreed as being good for the happiness of the individual and for the welfare of the community. Let us be careful to teach these to our children at an impressible period of their life. Let us be careful in our dealings with our fellow-men to practise them ourselves. I have already said that ethical rules are first acquired empirically. All practice is an art before it rises to the dignity of a science. But the scientific principles are there from the very first, and even at an early stage some glimpse of them is perceived. Ethical rules throughout the whole process of their evolution are not acquired empirically. They are acquired by the action and reaction of theory and practice. Sometimes practice out-runs theory and sometimes theory is a long way ahead of practice. Different theories produce different types of practice, and practice that is found agreeable frequently influences the theory that is adduced to support it. A confusion of theories produces a confusion of practice and leads to the frequent spectacle of some of the

noblest virtues existing side by side with debasing vices. And further, it is true that high-souled men and women, who are the product of generations of sublime theorists and beautiful lives, wearied with theological speculations they have never taken the trouble to understand, throw the metaphysical problem altogether overboard and continue to live on the accumulated spiritual capital of their ancestors.

But things have a way of straightening themselves out. Theory and practice are ever striving, by an inner compulsion, to an indissoluble union. Each theory of life tends, in the logical process of events, to produce its own peculiar ethos. Thought is free, and a man may, in the region of speculation, work out his system into what seems to him a perfect and complete whole. But action is not free. It is circumscribed by environment. It is continually modified by the action and influence of others. Degrading theories of life tend to produce degraded lives, but they do not always produce their full effect because of the restraining influences both from without and within that regulate conduct. And very noble theories of life fail to secure their natural high standard of living for a similar reason. Nay, further, the

moral instinct that is inwrought with the very constitution of human nature often rises in rebellion against inadequate theories that would seek to trammel it. Still the tendency is always there, and, given time, it will inevitably bear down all opposition and insist upon the unity of thought and action. The whole course of history proves that this is so. The decay or dissolution of the religious sanction of morals on a large scale has always resulted in a moral cataclysm. When no valid reason has been given for the assertion of the spiritual nature of man, his lawless passions have raged unchecked and no purely ethical appeal has availed to control them. And again, when there has been a great outburst of ethical activity, it has inevitably followed a great religious awakening. This was so with all the historic empires and kingdoms of antiquity. They emerge into history with the advent of epoch-making religious thinkers. They sink back into oblivion when the force of such heroic souls is spent. And the process of Christian development gives further striking evidence of this universal principle. What did Stoicism—which is mainly a system of pure ethics—do for the purification of the Roman Empire? Very little. Its practical influence among the people is hard to trace.

But Jesus Christ came, and He implanted in the hearts of His followers what were really metaphysical convictions about God and Himself and the Holy Spirit and the destiny of man. And then was seen the difference between a vital force rooted in the nature of the universe and a mere superficial platitudinising that had no root in reality. Run down the whole course of Christian history and think of the names that are associated with those leading epochs when an influx of moral energy gave new life to a materialised social organism. St. Boniface, Hildebrand, St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Dominic, John Hus, John Wycliffe, Luther, Knox, Calvin, Wesley—what was the leading motive of their lives? Were these men secretaries of ethical societies, who drew up in their studies lists of unconnected duties to be learned by rote by boys and girls on the school benches? Nothing of the kind. They were elemental forces, whose souls drew their inspiration from the Great Reality, and who knew that life had no value save in so far as it was rooted in the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. I confess that there is nothing more curious to me in much of our modern literature than the homage that is paid to such great souls in the past by men who

recognise their ethical pre-eminence and the magnificence of their idealism, but who dismiss the religious element in them, the vital pulse of their whole being, as merely the superstition of their age and of no significance for the philosopher. Why, it is to misread the most patent facts of history to fail to recognise that it is a positive religion rooted in a metaphysical ground that has been the parent of every ethical movement that has achieved any great measure of success. The pathetic failures of history have been the men who, with a large-hearted but weak-minded benevolence, have thought to ethicise the community while ignoring the one mighty lever that can alone rouse into passionate enthusiasm the whole spiritual nature of man.\*

The lesson for to-day is obvious. The Church is sometimes in danger, with the best intentions in the world, of lowering its flag. It is in danger, in order to secure a reputation for tolerance and broadmindedness, of treating its Creed as a mere private possession, a kind of luxury to those who believe it, as affording them a stimulus to action, a comfort in trial, a stay in temptation, and a great hope, that brightens the dark places of this earthly life. It is in danger of admitting

\* Is not Robert Owen a striking instance ?



that a man may be a high-souled altruist and yet deliberately reject every article of the Christian Creed, and that the pressing ethical problems of the social organism can be solved apart from religion. It is a fatal mistake. If the Christian Creed be essentially a true theory of the universe, it must be the source of all life's noblest manifestations, and there can be no such manifestations apart from it. Of course, we must admit the very palpable fact that there are many men who are not Christian who are faithful to their moral duties and are doing excellent work for humanity. We can only account for their illogical lives on the ground that, in the excursions and alarms of this confused and perplexing world, it is sometimes difficult just to see the flag under which we are fighting, and that such men are under a temporary obscuration of their intellectual vision. For we must hold that they have only to straighten out their lives and to trace their highest thoughts and their noblest actions to their proper source in order to find that they come from the inspiration of the Triune God, whose limitless love for humanity was manifested in the sacrifice of the Eternal Son on the cross of Calvary. And, further, we must also maintain that, pure as are their motives and generous as are their actions,

until they recognise their rightful Lord and fight consciously under His banner, their service is tainted with a fatal flaw that will ultimately mar its efficiency.

## **TO-DAY'S CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH**



## VI

### TO-DAY'S CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

WE come now to consider the result of the previous reasoning upon the Church as we know her to-day. It is a mere truism to assert that the condition of the Christian Church in all her branches is one of unrest and confusion. Everywhere there are signs of dubiety and perplexity. Not only is this so in our Protestant Churches, where we are accustomed to a freedom that restrains the province of authority within tolerably narrow limits, but the Modernist movement in the Church of Rome shows that even there symptoms of the general disquietude cannot be suppressed. It is not that men have lost interest in the Christian Church or ceased to regard her as a powerful religious and social force. But the conviction is growing in intensity that the Church is not now giving

expression to the most deeply cherished convictions of the strongest thinkers of the time and is not truly interpreting the spiritual experiences of the most devout souls. Neither is she, in the exercise of her function, tackling effectively those social sores which spring from the selfishness of human nature, or imposing her ethical standards upon the souls of men with that supernatural authority which enforces obedience. In short, what is demanded from the Church to-day by the spiritual consciousness of humanity is a clear and definite Creed that will fulfil the purpose of a Creed and an accurate statement of function that will enable the Church to settle to her God-appointed task with resolute decision.

But how are we to reach such a Creed? Creeds are not made any more than national constitutions. They grow. They are the expression of an organic developing life. In the great Creed-making ages the Church was intensely alive, and the passion for Creeds was the result of a passion for life. The life of the Church during the Conciliar period was lived among the masses of the people, where devoted men and women were endeavouring to bring the light of heaven into the souls of the poor, the enslaved, the oppressed, and where only

that definition of the Person of Christ found favour which served to explain the supernatural ecstasy that maintained their souls. And it is by no means a mere coincidence that only those definitions which were the expression of the life of the Church so long as she remained Catholic still retain the note of Catholicity. The Christian Creed must be the sublimated essence of the spiritual experience of Christendom. It must be a formula large enough to embrace every genuine emotion of the human soul under the influence of the Eternal Spirit of God. And so it is we find that the Catholic Creed which lies at the basis of the Christian life was wrought into definite form when the Church, still retaining her unity amid the incessant clash of strong divergent personalities, was throbbing with a vigorous and even passionate life which absorbed all their spiritual faculties.

There have been other Creed-making ages, notably the period of the Reformation. The sixteenth century again found men forced by an inner compulsion to give definite expression to their spiritual emotions. And again the impulse came from the necessities of practical life. Men by whom life was accepted as a terrible responsibility stood face to face with

tremendous moral evils, with religious formulæ from which the vitality had departed, with an overwhelming weight of alien despotism that threatened to deprive the soul of its natural freedom of development. It was not enough for them to oppose the evils of their time by a mere negative—to assert that they could not believe what for them had no meaning, that they could not acquiesce in a tyranny which bound humanity, body and soul, in a degrading thralldom. They demanded freedom to work out their destiny, but they were forced to assert in the clearest terms what they conceived their destiny to be, and along what lines their freedom was to be exercised. And, again, we find one dominant note running through their Creeds, forced on them by the actualities of their situation. It is the Sovereignty of God. The forces of the world ranged against them loomed so large in their eyes, and they were individually so weak and helpless, that they were nerved to the contest only by the burning conviction that God's sovereign power was irresistible and that they were simply the instruments of Omnipotence in carrying out His eternal decrees.

But the Reformation Creeds were sectional. They were true in so far as they represented



genuine spiritual emotions and convictions. All Creeds that have been beaten out of the hearts of men asserting their God-given rights as against the tyranny of an alien environment are in their essence true. But the only doctrines that can be incorporated in a Catholic Creed of Christendom must have passed through the alembic of the universal Christian consciousness and have touched the spiritual life of man at every point. It is really their one-sidedness, their lack of universality, that is the root of the objection to the Reformation Creeds. They were the outcome of a protest, and a protest can never be a religion. Their tenets are no doubt positive enough, but their tenets are stated as against other forms of belief which are not altogether dissimilar, instead of being stated in such a way as to include the genuinely religious element contained in all forms of religious belief.

But if dissatisfaction with the Creed of the Church is a characteristic of the age, there is as great dubiety and searching of heart as to her function. The Church is the home of the spirit. The Church exists to satisfy the spiritual instincts and to direct the spiritual energies of men. Her function, stated in the most general terms, is the salvation of

souls. But what does that involve? We have no experience of souls except as they act through mortal bodies, and soul and body are so inter-related, and maintain themselves in being by such a close process of interaction, that it is difficult to see how one can work on souls with any advantage and yet pay no heed to the bodies in which they are incarnated. To say that the Church exists merely for the salvation of souls, in the popular sense of the phrase, is a statement that does not carry us very far, and is one with which large sections of the Church are becoming growingly dissatisfied.

Surely, here again history must come to our help. How did the Church interpret her function when she first began to be? How has the Church interpreted her function throughout the Christian centuries? There is no doubt she has taken the largest possible view of her sphere, that she has considered everything that bears upon the welfare of man as a rational being, with faculties to be developed for an immortal life, as under her controlling influence. Her struggle throughout history, indeed, has been to assert herself as the dominant factor in moulding the destinies of humanity. The Church, in every age

and in every country, when the pulse of a genuine vitality has throbbed within her, instinctively, even in her smallest branches, has perilled her very life in the assertion that she claimed supreme authority over the whole man. It is only in quite recent years that she has been partially driven to acquiesce in a divided allegiance.

And the acquiescence has been the result of a chain of causes that sprang from the Church's defection from her own ideal. For many centuries it can truly be said that the Church, in spite of all defects and blemishes, was yet the home of the spirit. The Church was the centre of all the spiritual activities of humanity. From the Church emerged the rich variety of discipline that moulded the modern civilised man, whose ideal is to be versed in all learning, adorned with all the gifts and graces of the Christian character. The Church, in the Christian centuries, was the source of philanthropy, art, music, literature, science, every branch of culture that made for the orderly evolution of the whole man. The Church assumed the charge of fostering and developing the spiritual energies of humanity by natural right, simply as part of her inherent function. And so long as

she wisely exercised her authority and gave to the spirit of man free scope for its reasonable exercise, her right remained unquestioned, and the venerable Mother received from her children the deference that was her due.

But, in the providence of God, the orderly development of the Church's function was not to be. The Church failed to realise her ideal and to maintain that balance of all her parts that constitutes the healthy organism. She lost her moral purity, she blurred her own ethical standards, she stiffened her formulæ till they no longer throbbed with the spiritual life of her children. She used her power tyrannically to repress the legitimate aspirations of her thinkers. She became to some of her noblest sons and daughters no longer a venerable Mother, but a cruel stepmother against whom they were forced to rebel. The children stood over against the parent, divided from one another and in deadly antagonism to the Mother who bore them.

And then gradually the Church of Christ suffered in all her branches. One by one her prerogatives were taken from her. Art went its own way, throwing off its allegiance to the Church, acknowledging only the laws

of form and colour which regulate the special medium of its expression. Literature took an independent course, and was oftener antagonistic than friendly to the Church. Philosophy, despising the experience of the past, sought to think out the universe afresh for itself. Science, provoked by unwise interference, assumed an aggressively hostile attitude to all religion whatsoever. Bit by bit philanthropy was dissociated from the Church and handed over to secular hands. Not without a struggle, indeed, but still as surely, has the discipline of the young been forced from her, and she is being obliged more and more to look on helplessly at an ideal of education which is a mere imparting of information instead of that all-round training of the whole man as a citizen of the universe which can only rest upon a theologico-ethical basis. Her doctrines, emptied of their ethical content, have become mere metaphysical puzzles or verbal contradictions, tacitly assumed or openly asserted to be the crude guesses of an ignorant and pre-scientific age.

Is not this the condition into which the Christian Church has fallen to-day? The Church which moulded our modern civilisation has not only ceased to be the dominant

force in the evolution of human society, but even where her influence is recognised it is scarcely thought desirable that she should be. All those practical activities in which the spirit of man finds expression, and articulates itself in institutions, are largely outside and independent of the Church, which has become a mere voice, proclaiming even the fundamental verities with a somewhat wavering and uncertain tone. The Church, as a matter of fact, is simply tolerated even by many of her own members, and is only tolerated when she realises her own impotence and gives as little trouble as possible. Is it any wonder that in such a state she should be all at sea both as to her creed and her function? If, as it has been my aim to show, function and creed are causally inter-related, a Church truncated of all the activities which naturally developed from her pristine faith must have some difficulty in understanding the metaphysical root from which she sprang. A supernatural life demands a supernatural creed, but where the life is slow, sleepy, humdrum, and uneventful, the supernatural creed fades away and becomes even impossible of conception. When the Church is able once more to give sight to the blind and hearing

to the deaf, to raise the dead to life, to make the wicked in high places tremble as at the presence of the Lord, to preach with fervency and power to the poor lost souls in the Hades of slumdom what shall be really glad tidings of great joy, and to clothe the earth with the beauty of holiness, then the supernatural Creed will come back again and men will wonder they ever missed it.

And how is this to be done? How is the Church to rise to the height of her calling and to assert herself as the power of God unto salvation?—the only power that can teach men the art of living and rescue human society from chaos and the abyss. Is this tremendous task to be accomplished by a creedless Church—a Church which cannot find in the accumulated spiritual experiences of the past centuries one single definite conviction that roots her activities in Reality? Is it to be done by a Church that has no clear grasp of her function, but goes blundering on, groping her way in the darkness, trying social experiments that touch the outermost fringe of our social evils, fearful even here lest she pollute her spiritual garments by too gross a contact with earth? Is it to be done by a Church torn with internecine feuds—a

Church split into fragments, each separate fragment capable of being roused into real enthusiasm only when it is a question of tearing out her sister's eyes or bespattering her raiment with mud?

Never. If the Church of Christ is really to face the present situation, and to become the predominant influence in moulding the future course of human history, she must show herself capable of rising above all petty sectional strife, and of viewing the forces at work in the modern world with large, statesmanlike vision. She must move with a definite aim, under a banner with a clear device, presenting a united front.

*She must move with a definite aim.* What is the function the Church proposes to fulfil? Let us start with the popular definition that the Church exists to save souls. Only let us take the phrase with its Gospel meaning. "Whosoever will save his  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  for My sake, shall save it."\* To Jesus, then, to save one's soul was to live one's life. There must be no narrowing of the Gospel definition. The Church of Jesus Christ exists to enable men to live out their lives. Salvation is the right

\* St. Matthew xvi. 25.



reaction of the human spirit with its divinely gifted energies upon its material environments. It is the absorption into and assimilation with its life of all created elements in a divinely ordered universe. It is, in short, the maximum of life-giving experience, the fulness of life itself. Jesus came that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. The function of the Church, then, is to teach men the art of living, and to supply them with those spiritual resources which will enable their lives to develop to the full height of their essential powers and capacities.

*Under a banner with a clear device.* The Church's creed is the intellectual symbol of the influence that is to beget and develop, in the individual, this full human life. Her creed embodies the stored wisdom of the past. It is the quintessence of the spiritual experience of millions of human souls who have attained the higher levels of life and have blessed life altogether. The truth that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself"\* must be blazoned on her banners so that every eye may see it. "Ah! surely," say some, "but shall we not stop here? God truly was in Christ, just as God is in me, and in the loftier

\* 2 Cor. v. 19.

reaches of spiritual thinking and devoted living I can touch hands with Him across the centuries and hail him as a brother. But I can climb no higher. In those metaphysical altitudes to which you would drag me I grow faint and giddy, and my breath is taken quite away." Yes; but then the Church exists to take man's breath away, to be higher than the highest of man's achievement, nobler than the noblest of man's conception. "God was in Christ," nay, Christ was the very and eternal Son of God, Incarnate for man's redemption. It is the experience of the great souls of humanity. It is the enraptured cry of the saints and mystics who, following in His steps, have gone down to the depths of human degradation, and have seen His miracles and have enjoyed the glory of His Presence. It is too high for you, you say. You want a creed that is to be as narrow as your own experience, a creed you can measure with the foot-rule of your feeble intellect. Nay, but the Church's Creed is not the lowest that her children can conceive of God. It is the highest. It is the experience of her noblest souls in that pure, rarified atmosphere where God has spoken face to face with them as a man talketh with his friends.

*Presenting a united front.* The wider the spiritual circle touched by the individual soul, the more fully beats the pulse of its vitality. The friendships that conduce most to the enrichment of life are always between souls of dissimilar temperament, attracted by a mutual admiration which is cemented by the mystic seal of love. When men of similar temperaments and identical aims get together, their friendship degenerates into a hard and narrow thing dividing them from the rest of the world, upon which they look with cold suspicion and dislike. Now, this is a principle that lies in the nature of this mysterious universe, and it was a principle which was stated in the clearest terms from the very first to be involved in the conception of the Christian Church. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."\* The ideal of the Church was conceived to be the harmonious co-working of the rich variety of temperaments and capacities with which God in the infinity of His power had endowed His children, under the influence of a common spirit, towards the building up of a City of God in which there should be no sameness, but always a perfect artistic symmetry. The

\* 1 Cor. xii. 4.

life of the individual within the spiritual confines of the Church was to be a forthgoing of all his powers and faculties to meet and mingle with a similar forthgoing of the powers and faculties of other souls, so as to produce a blending of opposites, a hearing with each other's ears, a seeing with each other's eyes, a feeling with each other's hearts, a rich, living, palpitating stream of variegated life, where experience brought ever-fresh discoveries, ever newer and intenser delights, where monotony, satiety, ennui, the bane of the isolated life, were impossible conceptions.

This is the Scriptural ideal of the Church, but what of the reality? We do find, as a matter of fact, this vast variety of spiritual temperament within which lie such magnificent possibilities for the life of the soul. But instead of drawing men closer together in the religious life, it only serves to widen the gulf that separates them. And this results simply because of the inveterate habit of clinging to that self-isolation which it is the avowed aim of the Gospel to break up, which, indeed, is the Gospel definition of sin. The attitude of the different fragments of the Church to-day is, at bottom, in spite of friendly

overtures, one of suspicion, almost a mutual determination to misunderstand each other. I have said already, and I repeat, that there are none of the great divisions of Christendom that have not their historical justification. They spring from a clash of ideals, from a warring of diverse temperaments. It is quite true that they were merely antitheses which might have been embraced in a higher synthesis, that they represented points of view, basic principles, which a noble magnanimity might have united in mutual harmony. But the synthesis is not yet apparent, and all attempts at union on the lower platform that produced the division are foredoomed to failure. The task of the present hour, then, is not to force an artificial and premature union, but rather to strive after a mutual understanding of different ideals and temperaments, such as comes naturally, to their glorious gain, to friends who love each other. Who can deny that we are still very far from that? I venture to say that it is well-nigh impossible to find a Low Churchman who could give a clear, intellectual statement of the essential aims and ideals of his High Church brother, while the High Churchman has an equal difficulty of understanding what

his Low Church brother stands for. I have found few convinced Voluntaries who really comprehend what we mean by "national religion," none who in controversy ever state our position correctly, while, I must confess, we have sadly failed in imbuing our own members with the undoubted truth for which Voluntaryism in religion stands. What is called Broad Churchism is frequently simply a lack of imagination and a coldness of temperament that cannot enter into the fervour of evangelical zeal, while Evangelicalism, on account of its narrow intellectual outlook, generally looks with suspicion and distrust upon attempts to place its own position on a sound metaphysical basis. All these various phases of thought and feeling are in our day mutually antagonistic to each other. They are represented by different parties or different sections of the Church, who deem it the first of duties to be loyal to their own religious principles by attacking all others, and imagine every petty triumph of their cause to be a victory gained for God and truth and righteousness. And yet a large historical survey of the religious field clearly shows that the differences are as inevitable as human nature, and that a successful attempt to suppress or destroy any

genuine phase of religious faith would be to undo the work of the Creator and to impoverish the spiritual treasury of this miraculous human life.

Nevertheless, the united front is necessary if we are to secure a common creed and a definite aim. How, then, is the Church to get the full value, alike in her intellectual and practical activities, of this infinite variety of human temperament, this exhaustless endowment of human souls? How is the City of God to be reared—its fabric coruscating with the brilliance of innumerable facets, each reflecting according to its own nature the rays of the Sun of Righteousness? Are we simply to aim at reducing all differences of belief to a common, colourless formula, and setting definite limits in ritual and government beyond which no one is to be allowed to transgress? Are we to say to the High Churchman, insatiable of doctrine, “You must reduce your doctrine to a common denomination and restrain your ritual within limits your Low Church brother can tolerate”? Are we to tell the Low Churchman that he must submit to a certain amount of ritual for the sake of uniformity? Are we to implore the Broad Churchman to keep his speculations within the limits of prudence for

fear of offending his weaker brother, and the Evangelical to moderate his transports and restrain his excitement? Are we to assure the Voluntary that we are quite at one with him in his main contention, and exhort the adherents of a national religion to resign their privileges and hold their most cherished convictions in solution in order to give the Church an outward semblance of union? The very statement of such a method of securing unity reveals its absurdity. The Christian religion is not a religion of limits, but of infinity. It is not a loosening of conviction, but a strengthening. It is not a system of restraints, but an impulsive outflowing of all one's nature towards an ever receding ideal. If we believe at all, our belief is worth nothing unless we believe with our whole heart. I have nothing whatever to give you except my own convictions—convictions I have made my own by hard thinking and active doing. You have nothing to give me that I am in the slightest degree interested in except conviction similarly obtained. I can learn something from the High Churchman who has perilled his soul for the truth of doctrines which he devotes all his energies in translating into life. I can learn nothing from his pale, ineffectual brother who



so little understands his own position that he is willing to waive the very keystone of his system in order to earn a reputation for large-mindedness by adopting the methods of men whose religious attitude is antagonistic to his own. If the Evangelical is to add anything to the common treasury, it is the red-hot Evangelical who alone has anything worth giving, the man who has been shaken over the mouth of hell, has felt the awful terror of the wrath of God against sin, and can transfix his audience with the spell of the supernatural. Better leave things as they are than have a union that will only damp enthusiasm and stifle conviction. The only union that can ever be effectual is the union that plucks from each sect or party the glowing embers that constitute its life, and throws them into a common heap to blaze to heaven in one mighty bonfire that will consume all the base passions and mean ambitions that fill the earth with sin and misery.

No, we must make up our minds that union is not to be secured by a cold, calculating search for ambiguous terms, or a prudent restraint in administration and ritual which will satisfy the lukewarm within the Church pale. But suppose we turn to ask ourselves

how, taking things as they are, the Church is fulfilling her function? The Church exists to save souls. Well, is she saving souls in the Scriptural meaning of the term? Is she really enabling men to live out their lives, to develop all their capacities, to take out of this present human existence the full possibilities of spiritual being? Is she infusing into the hearts and souls and intellects of those who are under her influence the true meaning of the age they live in, enabling them to absorb all its higher tendencies and to reject all its debasing influences? And is she making continual inroads upon the domain of darkness, rescuing souls from the abyss of misery and sin, and opening blinded eyes to the pure light of heaven? In every age of Christian history when the Church was a living reality she produced the typical men of the age, the men who summed up its highest characteristics and were recognised as the true leaders of life and thought. In ages of the Church's decadence and of moral collapse, such men were without the Church, and were often mere masses of ill-regulated passion and power. Is the Church thus holding the lead to-day?

What is the foe against which in every age the Church of Jesus Christ has to fight? It

is the carnal man that is at enmity with God. It is the dominance of the material that always threatens spiritual insight and moral vigour. Now, there are two phenomena of our time that the most casual observer cannot fail to mark.

The first is the enormous extension of irresponsible wealth. Remember that in the civilisation created by the Christian Church there was intended to be no such thing as irresponsible wealth. The feudal system, *e.g.*, which is so intimately associated with the Mediæval Church, was in its essence a socialistic system. It regarded human society as an organic whole, in which privileges and responsibilities were strictly correlated. It is very easy to point to the failures of feudalism, to draw a lurid picture of its brutalities, its tyrannies, its incessant wars. But we must remember the human material with which the Church's ideal had to work, and we must also remember that it is the dark side of the picture that history inevitably records. The convergence of independent testimony undoubtedly goes to prove that for many centuries feudalism worked well, produced order out of chaos, and gave to human life an ideality and picturesqueness it sadly lacks to-day.\*

\* See Note K, "The Church in the Middle Ages."

The point, however, to be insisted on, is that in Mediæval Europe the responsibility of wealth, power, and place was inherent in the very conception of the social organism. Even when the rise of cities saw the dawning of a new order, and wealth was divorced from landed possessions and became more personal, this conception was taken over by the new men who rose to power. Wealth was not used for mere personal ostentation. It was, for the most part, sought and employed for civic adornment. The city became the nursery of art, learning, and philanthropy, and its citizens vied with each other in the lavishness of their expenditure on stately public buildings, hospitals, and noble churches. No doubt the ideal was not universal. No doubt there were many who wasted their means in riotous living, and in mere personal and selfish extravagance. But the ideal was there, a living thing; and those who did not try to live up to it were conscious of defect. They knew they were doing wrong, were committing sin. The first sign of contrition in a wealthy sinner was to return to the great civic ideal and, for the salvation of his soul, to devote his wealth to the promotion of the common weal.

But all this has passed away. The Church

has lost her power of enforcing the responsibility of wealth. The very idea belongs to an ancient world and a fabric of society that no longer exists. The doctrines of economic science were fatal to it. According to these doctrines, the best thing you can do for a man is to leave him alone to fight his way through the world for himself. Society will settle its complicated system of adjustments with beautiful simplicity, if only each man keeps an enlightened eye upon his own personal advantage. The Church failed to master and adapt herself to the new environment, and as, moreover, she gradually let slip from her all those practical activities of philanthropy, education, art, and the higher culture of the soul which she had hitherto regarded as her special function, not only did she fail to impress upon men, who had wealth far beyond their power of successful administration, their responsibility to God for the talent He had given, but she failed to furnish an adequate outlet that might appeal to their piety or stir their imagination. The Church cannot get the means to fulfil her function because she is not able to convince the men who have it that she can use it wisely. She leaves them embarrassed with their useless hoards. In

their painful perplexity we are told they have forgotten how to smile.\*

And the consequence of this impotence of the Church is a prodigal, wasteful, and ostentatious private expenditure which has no meaning in it, no touch of artistic feeling, no sense of the occasions when princely display is right as adding to the richness and picturesqueness of life. The ideal is shifted. Wealth clings to its irresponsibility. Granted there are noble exceptions, for my words must be taken simply as indicating a general tendency, even men of genuine civic spirit and religious zeal seem incapable of rising to the old conceptions that ennobled mercantile enterprise and gave it a touch of romance. They dole out their benefactions as charities, works of supererogation to which they are in no wise bound, and which bear no real relation to the abundance of their resources. Their gifts have no note of largeness of spirit, of magnanimity, as of men who reckon it a privilege worth a long life's strenuous endeavour to be able to do something for the land that gave them birth, for the Church that ensouled them, for the people whose labours have accorded them a coveted pre-eminence. The art of giving has

\* "Millionaires never smile," says Andrew Carnegie.

become a lost art. The spirit is gone that enriched those mediæval cities and clothed them with so glorious a beauty that the very sight of them, even in their mouldering decay, by those who have not yet lost the use of their eyes, makes the heart leap and seems to quicken dim memories of forgotten possibilities of joy.

And if this is so even with many of the best of those who rise to wealth, what of the worst? Has there ever been, since the days of the later Roman Empire, such a deliberate degradation of life's ideals? To be rich, or if that is impossible to appear rich, is the one ambition of great masses of our people to-day. To spend life in a giddy round of dissipation so colourless, monotonous, and inane to the intellectual vision that one wonders how it continues to be tolerated by sane men and women, to exhaust imagination in devising new forms of pleasure, to sound the depths of vulgarity in order to discover fresh methods of ostentatious display—that is all that very many who have the treasures of seven thousand years of human civilisation at their feet can make of this wonderful human life. In the weary monotony of their luxurious mansions no touch of religious emotion ever stirs their withered souls, no real perception of the beauty of earth and sea and

sky ever makes their pulses throb; their intellectual vacuity shuts them out from all that scientist, philosopher, and poet have revealed of the wonders of the universe. Alas! it is one of the tragedies of modern times. And the most tragic note of all is that the Church is powerless to excite one pang of conviction of sin, one sigh of penitence, one real intense desire to emerge into the light, in this mass of gross materialistic worldliness. The Church has lost her own ideals and has ceased to be taken seriously.

And there is another picture. Packed in their teeming millions in their dreary tenement houses are the manual toilers whose labour is indispensable to the production of the wealth that is so foolishly and extravagantly wasted. I am not going to indulge in any rhetorical exaggeration as to the miseries of the great mass of the artisan classes in our cities. In many respects theirs is a nobler and better life—a life richer in ideals—than that of the foolish and ill-educated rich whose wealth has increased without any increase in intellectual and moral culture. In its higher aspects, too, it is a life with a rich vitality in it, a life growing in sympathy with the true ideals of the Church. It is among this class that the Church is doing



its best work to-day, and from which it is still recruiting its strongest and most intelligent adherents. To such the Church means something, affording an outlet to their energies and a guidance in their higher aspirations to which they eagerly respond. And yet, while it would be wrong to lose sight of the support the Church is receiving from the artisan class, it cannot be denied that large masses of the workers are out of touch with the Church. They have no particular quarrel with religion, and they are perfectly willing that Church agencies should undertake the guidance of their children, but their ideals are materialised, and the Church fails to inspire them with any living interest in her eternal message.

Penetrate deeper and the picture grows lurid with fateful suggestiveness. Below the self-respecting artisan class—the general body of genuine workers, taking the term in its widest sense—there is a mass of poverty, misery, drunkenness, and vice, that is threatening the stability of our modern civilisation. It is not true to say that the cleavage between rich and poor is growing greater in our times. That is not what is happening. It is rather that the industrial machinery of the social organism, while still

producing a continuous steady output of men and women (the majority) who are in the happy state that they have neither poverty nor riches, is throwing off as waste material the useless, foolish, and extravagant rich, and the degraded poor who have sunk into such a state of misery, moral torpor, and inefficiency that life on the terms they alone can live seems scarcely worth having. Their labour is casual and at best of little value. They live in houses which no sanitary legislation can make fit habitations for human beings. Drink is the only solace of their misery, their only emergence into the world of their dreams. They marry when mere boys and girls, and go on steadily producing children of a low physical vitality to pass their lives amid the same wretched surroundings with the same dreary purposelessness. They fill our gaols with habitual drunkards and criminals of the low, brutal, and stupid type. They crowd our poor-houses. At the first wave of trade depression the futile labour\* of even the best of them is dispensed with, and

\* "It may not be too much to say that if the whole of class B were swept out of existence, all the work they do could be done, together with their own work, by classes C and D; that these classes, and especially class C, would be immensely better off, while no class, nor any industry, would suffer the least."—Booth's "Labour and Life of the People."

they are maintained in being by a costly and demoralising charity. They are a menace to society because they are a drag on the wheels of industry. They create a seething abyss which has a fatal fascination for those immediately above them, and they deaden the national conscience by accustoming it to scenes of misery and vice.

This soulless mass, alike of ignorant wealth and degrading poverty, is the crude material which it is the primary function of the Church to ensoul, to regenerate. The Church must approach her task with a creed, for she must believe, at least, in the possibility of exercising her own function. She must believe in the remission of sins. She must believe in the feasibility of redemption. She must believe in man, and for that reason she must believe in God. She must believe that the Spirit of God is capable even of making these dry bones live. It is a tremendous leap of faith. When one believes that, miracles cease to be impossible.

How is the Church to show her faith in this wonderful transformation, to assert her belief that she is the predestined instrument in God's hands for the regeneration of society? Faith without works is dead. Faith is the

driving power of human activity, and when our religious faith has ceased to drive, then it has become unfaith—rank atheism. How are we, then, on the one hand, to create a living conscience as to the responsibility of wealth? How are we, on the other, to bring a living Gospel to bear upon the miserable children of the abyss, that their starved souls shall find nourishment, and the more abundant life shall flush their hearts with joy? How is the Church, in short, to teach men the true art of living and to enable them to get out of this human life its full possibility of happiness?

Just as she has faced similar difficulties before and proved herself the saviour of society at each critical period of the world's history. I venture to propound a paradox which, I believe, a survey of the historical process of Christianity will justify. When the Church has attempted small things in a small way she has invariably failed. Church history, even in its great and stirring epochs, is full of petty peddling details which sadden the heart, perplex the conscience, and fill the pious Christian with shame and humiliation. And in its seasons of aridity the faint effervescences of spiritual life have bubbled up

and died away, and seemingly left no trace behind. But, again, take a large view of the process of the centuries and you will find that when the Church has attempted great things in a great way she has always succeeded. When she has struck the grand note the symphony has been loud, clear, sonorous. When, *e.g.*, the spirit of man was touched in mediæval times with the mystery of the Incarnation, and the prevailing thought was to furnish the God-man with a shrine suited to the magnificence of the religious conception of Incarnate Deity that lay at the core of the social organism, the æsthetic faculty was so strikingly quickened that all Europe was clothed with beauty, and art reached the culmination of its power. When, again, the city began to arise with its attendant evils, and the vices and miseries of slumdom to threaten civilisation, the figure of Jesus, the All-loving, the Friend of the lost and the degraded, appeared to great souls like St. Francis with such sweet fascination, and inspired such utter devotion, that the movement of the friars sent shafts of light through the darkness and disease of decaying feudalism.\* And this truth is clearly evidenced

\* See Note L, "The Franciscans."

in the whole confused period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Reformation was successful up to the truth that was in it. So long as the great Reformers were men of vision, who saw straight into the heart of things, who took their stand upon eternal verities and enlisted the conscience of mankind, the Reformation was an elemental force, purifying the moral atmosphere and raising men to higher levels of life and thought. But when it became petty and opinionative, mere political strife animated with partisan rancour, its power faded away and it ceased to exercise even its legitimate influence in the development of the modern world. There is no need to multiply instances. There is a note to which, when struck, the human heart will instinctively respond, while it listens, listless and amused, to "the feeble pipings of an empty day." \*

Boldly, then, the Church must return to those inherent ideas of her function which are inwrought with her very constitution. She must believe that she is more than a mere preaching institution, called into being simply to indulge in oratorical pyrotechnics to interest and excite those who are willing to

\* William Morris, "The Earthly Paradise."

attend her weekly ministrations. She must believe, as the Primitive Church believed, that the charge of Jesus Christ was given to His organic body, "I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."\* She must, moreover, have her own views on education, art, science, business, and all human activities, and must use her own means to propagate and enforce them. She must maintain that the basis of society is ethical, that the ethical system on which our civilisation was originally moulded is Christian, and that she alone inherits the Christian tradition and understands the methods by which Christian ethics are to be enforced. She must never be afraid to speak out on all great questions that involve moral issues, from her own ethical standpoint, clearly disentangling the moral issue from all mere party or partisan methods of translating it into practice.

Suppose we take this one question of slum-

\* St. Matthew xxv. 35 seq.

dom and ask what our Churches in Scotland would do if they rose to this historic view of the function of the Christian Church. We shall get at the answer better by trying to imagine that there was nobody meddling and muddling in the matter, and that the field was clear for the Church of Jesus Christ attempting to apply the precepts of the Gospel in face of the hideous degradation of our great cities. There are undoubtedly two aspects of the problem with which she would immediately concern herself.

Let us remember that the historic Church has never believed in the divine right of ignorance, nor in a spiritual illumination that superseded hard work and patient intellectual study. Such an attitude has been left to the sectaries. The Church has found her leaders in the great souls of the race, has fostered genius, and has developed statesmanship. She has aimed at imbuing her official representatives with the whole culture of the age in which they lived, in order to give them a wider outlook and a truer apprehension of their mission. And confronted then, as I have imagined, with this festering mass of degraded humanity, which, she believed with strong conviction, she alone had power to



ensoul, would she not, while not intermitting continuous practical efforts to uplift it, devote her intellectual energies to a clear understanding of the meaning of it all? The Church has never despised culture, but she has over and over again forgotten that the culture of one age is not the culture of another. The cultured man to-day is not the man who can write Latin verses or construe a difficult passage in Thucydides. It is well if he can add these accomplishments to his other acquirements, but his culture is sadly defective if he has not studied the philosophy of the State, if he is not familiar with the ethical and economic processes that determine the rise and fall of nations. A clear and comprehensive knowledge of the environment of those to whom he addresses the Gospel message ought to lie in the background of the mind of every minister of Christ. It is his one and only duty, no doubt, to infuse into the souls of those upon whom he is working the spirit of the Gospel of Christ, but he will do so with little effect unless he understands the nature of the influences that are baffling his best efforts. This seems to be so obvious a truth that the singular apathy of all our Churches towards it can only be explained

by the fact that slumdom is not yet lying as a burden upon their consciences. They imagine it to be a problem that has been handed over to other agencies, and that their members can rest at peace in their cushioned pews.

But, further, if our Churches really felt the weight of this horrid nightmare, felt that they were traitors to the cause of Christ if they dared to hand over the souls and bodies of a submerged tenth to ignorant enthusiasts or the red-tapeism of State control, would there not be such an overwhelming determination to come into line as would sweep away all difficulties to union? Mark, this is the one subject at the present day that excites passion, that stirs the soul to that glow of white heat that makes welding possible. Here alone, if anywhere, shall we find the synthesis that makes our differences intelligible and lifts us to that nobler unity that embraces opposites.

For, to take but one instance, one cannot cross the threshold of the social problem without being confronted with the riddle of Church and State. But somehow it seems to have put on a new phase. In the controversies of the political world it is a question of privilege. Shall the State throw the ægis of its protection

over one Church out of many, and endow it with certain privileges which other Churches cannot conscientiously take? Shall the State sanction its creed, safeguard its property, and call for its services when these are required? This, it would appear, is, to many, the sole issue that is involved in the historic quarrel as to the relationship between Church and State. But suppose we were in earnest about this social question, suppose we realised that it was a primary duty of the Church to feed the hungry, to minister to the sick in body and in soul, to leave the respectable squares of our great cities and to go into the mean streets and filthy backlands, breathing the foetid atmosphere where ignorance, vice, and crime fester in rank luxurious growth, is it not, at least, possible that the problem of Church and State might assume a different form? Might we not see that here was a problem of the greatest intricacy as of the most fascinating interest?—a problem for the successful solution of which it was absolutely necessary to understand the principles that lie at the basis of Church and State, in order to delimit their spheres and combine their influence. Might we not find that the ideal of a National Church is not privilege but duty,

that all a living Church can possibly ask from the State is freedom to fulfil its function, and that such freedom can only be obtained by a close working alliance that assigns to each its task and secures for each its rightful authority?

And then, too, we might consider this question of creed, which causes such searchings of heart. Is it not just possible that if we were to flush our creeds with that ethical vitality in which they had their origin, and which made them dearer than life itself to men who saw through them the eternal majesty of God and the winsomeness of a Saviour's love, they would assume a new meaning in our eyes? The great historic creeds are landmarks in history. They represent the floodtide of spiritual experience at epochal periods of human development. Let them remain as they are and be recognised for what they are. What they need is not revision, but explanation, the separation of the eternal spirit from the local and temporal wrappings that enclose it. And if we find, as undoubtedly we shall, that no sectional creed altogether covers our new experience, while that new experience is not yet clear, full, and rich enough to be capable of credal

expression, might we not meanwhile unite on that ancient creed of Nicea which is the root from whence all others spring, which has implicitly within it the whole fulness of Christian experience, and which, moreover, is acknowledged to-day by every great branch of the historic Church of Jesus Christ?



**THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF THE  
CHURCH IN MODERN LIFE**





## VII

### THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH IN MODERN LIFE

I HAVE been told that I am dreaming dreams and seeing visions, that I am dwelling in the past and trying to put back the hands of the clock. The Church never can be again what she has been in bygone centuries. She never can be the visible centre of the spiritual activities of mankind. The Church has played her part in the evolution of the social organism. She has largely contributed to the creation of the modern State, and having created it, she has wisely devolved upon the State those duties which, in a more primitive society, naturally fell to her. Education and philanthropy on a national scale are the work of the State. As for art, literature, and science, these depend upon the initiative of individuals, and the Church will be wise if

she leaves them severely alone. The Church's function to-day is simply to permeate individuals with the spirit of the Gospel, to diffuse an atmosphere of altruism, and inspire men to works of charity and thoughts of love.

But, surely, the very idea of going back is at variance with the whole course of my argument. The Church, like every living body, is continually evolving, adapting herself to new environments, manifesting the one eternal Spirit under changed conditions. History never repeats itself. We study history not for the purpose of imitating the past, but of understanding the nature of the forces, both good and evil, that have made the past, that we may direct them to shape the future according to our highest ideals. These forces remain the same. The spirit that is the source of phenomena never changes in essence, though its manifestations may vary with the conditions under which it works. The Church cannot change in her essential nature without losing her inherent vitality. She must still, as heretofore, claim supremacy over the whole man, though the manner in which she asserts this claim will depend very greatly upon the state of the society in which she exercises her activity. It may freely be granted that the

Church can never have the visible organisation of the Middle Ages, without necessarily acquiescing in the idea that she must remain the futile spiritual force she is to-day; and the taunt of mediævalism is no very powerful argument against those who point to what she has been in the past as an indication of what a living Church based on the spiritual consciousness of all that is highest and best in humanity may yet be in the future.

It is further objected that many of the most crying evils of our time are not ethical but economic. The extremes of wealth and poverty are to be remedied by economic and political methods. Now, Religion cannot leave her own sphere and intrude on the sphere of politics without suffering serious detriment. Man's material welfare belongs to the political sphere of action. No doubt the highest national ideal is that of a State in which there shall be no grinding poverty and in which every individual shall be free to develop the best that is in him under favourable conditions. But it is the function of the State to secure the outward environment that conduces to this end. This can only be brought about by wise legislation based on a sound economic science. It is the sphere of politics, and of all sciences politics is

the most difficult. The moment we enter the domain of politics we are in a region of strife. We encounter the war of clashing opinions, the struggle of rival factions. Men, equal in moral earnestness and in intellectual ability, may be thoroughly agreed in their endeavour to remedy social evils, while they differ diametrically as to what the true remedy is. The Church which identifies herself with any particular theory of political action is courting a new source of division which is not legitimately hers and which can only increase her difficulties. She will gradually be absorbed in a party organisation and become a mere political caucus. The Church, therefore, that has the idea of catholicity even as a dim ideal must shun politics. Let her content herself by bringing her influence to bear on the individual and winning him in his public and private conduct to the ethics of the Gospel. Let her endeavour to make good citizens, and then leave them alone to work out their own legislative and institutional ideals for the welfare of the nation.

While this language is freely used by many and the Church well warned against crossing the barrier that confines her within her own sphere, we have to-day a large and growing party that would break down all barriers and

obliterate the distinction between politics and religion. Mr. R. J. Campbell, in his "Christianity and the Social Order," practically identifies the historic Church of Christ with modern socialism, and he has struck a note to which there has been a very considerable response both in Britain and America. The Church, if she is to fulfil her historic function and to attack the hideous evils of our modern civilisation at their very root, must range herself on the side of those who advocate the nationalisation of all the means of production. Only thus can poverty be abolished and the foolish and soul-destroying extravagance of the idle rich be made impossible. The mere preaching of the Gospel is no remedy for a state of matters which at bottom is not ethical, but is the result of a diseased social organism. Character cannot be built up till it is placed in a setting that will tend naturally to its true development. Doubtless, in the last resort the Church's one and only interest is the development of the spiritual faculties of man; but, as we know man, soul and body are not two things but one, and man's spiritual faculties can only be developed on a sound physical basis. Socialism is the practical application to human affairs of the golden rule. In socialism, therefore, lies the

only hope for an environment that will produce the Christian ethos, and the Church, if she is to be true to her history, must plunge forthwith into a political, socialistic propaganda.

We must examine carefully this position. It has an air of plausibility about it that is very alluring to many generous spirits to-day who are sick at heart over the impotence of the Church in face of the social miseries with which they are confronted in the exercise of their daily calling, and who resent with all the force of profoundly religious natures the pious platitudes with which they are told that the function of the Church is only to save souls and to permeate the community with altruistic sentiments.

It is necessary to understand clearly what we are talking about. Socialism, to-day, is a word of the vaguest meaning. It is surrounded with a halo of mystery as profound as ever encircled the abstrusest dogma of the Christian Church. It calls up before the mental vision a curious amalgam of intricate economic reasoning and popular economic fallacies, of the loftiest Christian ethics and the crude impulses of naturalism, of lives of noble self-devotion and lives of wanton self-indul-

gence. As we gaze at it through the dim haze of history we seem to see passing before us as in a phantasmagoria the whole range of human character, from the sweet saintliness of a St. Francis to the murderous insanity of a dog-leech Marat.

"Stop!" says the socialist. "We hear this kind of talk *ad nauseam*. We mean by socialism something very clear and definite; something, moreover, that is the natural development of orthodox economics, and is but the intelligent hastening of a process that is already going on in the natural evolution of society." Exactly; but no enthusiastic and rhetorical socialist sticks to this meaning. Socialism has a wider and a narrower signification. It is an *ideal* and it is a practical policy. The word is often used merely to denote the theory that the social organism is a unity, that every community lives by reciprocal service, that each man and woman has a definite function to fulfil in order to maintain the common weal, and has a right to demand that protection and those privileges that will secure to him and to her the due development of their specific individuality, so long as they fulfil this function. In this wider sense of the word socialism is the creed of every thinking

man. It is the ideal of the State. The problem of statecraft is simply to approach as near as possible to its realisation.

And in this sense of the word the Christian religion is the most emphatic assertion of socialism that has ever been made. It roots the socialistic ideal in the very nature of things, in the very conception of the God-head. Is it possible to find anything more magnificent as a statement of a true socialistic ideal than the Apostle Paul's definition of the Church?—"The Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love."\* The general principle that in a perfect society each individual gives to the community of the fulness of his capacity and receives from the community all that he needs in order to secure the harmonious development of all his God-given powers, is just a restatement of the root idea of Gospel ethics as enunciated by Jesus—"He that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it."†

But then, socialism has been narrowed down to-day to mean the latest economic expedient

\* Eph. iv. 15, 16.

† St. Matthew xvi. 25.



for the better distribution of wealth. This has always been one of the main problems of economic science, and it is undoubtedly now the most pressing problem in modern politics. But, like all political problems, it is one of the very greatest difficulty. There are so many factors to be taken into account, and the historic failures in its solution furnish so many terrible warnings. The volume of production must be maintained, the distribution of wealth must be automatic and not artificial, industry must be encouraged and idleness repressed, every stimulus must be applied to human energies so that society may get out of every one the best that is in him, the complex machinery of the social organism must be so delicately handled that no cataclysm similar to those that have brought the proudest State to destruction may lay waste the Empire. The scientific socialist, indeed, tells us that he has considered all these things and has overwhelmingly proved that his method will effect the maximum of good with the minimum of disturbance. But he cannot shut his eyes to the fact that there are men who conscientiously differ from him. Men who are willing to make as great sacrifices for the welfare of society as he is are honestly of

opinion, after having studied his arguments, that his remedy would only result in widespread corruption and general poverty. The socialist, therefore, must realise that he is merely a politician, working in the arena of politics, having the rights that are accorded in a free country to all who have definite political convictions, of ventilating his ideas and pushing them forward by every legitimate means. His is the political and economic and not the religious problem, and he has no right whatever, in advancing his economic theory, to the adventitious aid that religion may give. He represents a party in the State, among several parties, all, it is to be presumed, honestly striving for the national welfare. It is simply a confusion of ideas that makes him identify his cause with the cause of religion, and imagine, when he is merely advocating, *e.g.*, the nationalisation of railways, that he is effecting a religious revolution.

We must be perfectly clear on this point if the Church is to wield her due influence and to fill her proper sphere. No doubt there is a sense in which the aims of religion and the higher politics are identical, and in which Church and State may be regarded as simply different aspects of the same communal life.

But in the modern sense of the term politics is identified with party politics, that partisan strife through which the legislative needs of a nation are kept abreast of its moral and intellectual culture. It may be impossible to draw a hard and fast line separating the sphere of religion from this party warfare; but it is safe to say that it is only on very exceptional occasions, when great moral issues are clearly involved, that she will find it conducive to her own high aims to enter the political arena. The claim of mere political socialism to occupy a higher moral platform than that taken up by any other party cannot be admitted. In the enumeration and denunciation of our social evils all good men and women are agreed, and we must by no means identify the vivid eloquence that powerfully impresses them upon the national conscience with the legislative and administrative capacity that is able to remove them.

However intense, therefore, our sympathy with the suffering poor, however strong our feeling that the Church is not facing our crying social evils with that intensity of purpose and religious enthusiasm which ought to characterise her, we must beware of identifying the Church's organisation with any mere partisan methods

of social amelioration that lie outside of her proper sphere. Socialism and religion are essentially different things. The socialism of to-day is merely an economic device for the better distribution of wealth—one among several suggested by economists, politicians, and statesmen for the solution of a most difficult and intricate problem. Its place is in the political arena, where it has a right to vindicate its claims by argument through press and platform. Religion is a spirit touching the deepest springs of human emotion and passion, urging men to live nobler lives, to think more generous thoughts, to spend their talents and their faculties in the service of their fellow-creatures, and to aspire to a habitual communion with the Great Spirit of the Universe. Socialism, as a political system, aims merely at providing for the material needs of men. It supplies no machinery for cultivating the higher spiritual side of human nature. Religion teaches that man is the child of God, an immortal soul, dowered with spiritual, emotional, and intellectual faculties, in the exercise of which alone can true happiness ever be found—that the satisfaction of his material wants even to their fullest capacity would leave him a poor, miserable, discontented

creature if the cravings of his soul were uncared for. And, then, there is this further and profound difference. Socialism seeks its end by legislation, the ultimate sanction of which is force. Religion seeks to transform the heart of man, so that he shall seek those things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, by the inner constraint of his nature. It is as foolish, therefore, to identify socialism with religion as it is to speak of their natural antagonism. And in the prevalent confusion of ideas we find men continually doing both.

But while insisting upon the Church keeping herself free from political entanglements, are we to interpret this as meaning that the Church is to acquiesce in the idea that she must remain a mere preaching institution, taking no direct part in the practical activities of human life? Surely not; this would be to misinterpret her whole function. It would be to create an entirely new institution, cut off from the rich traditions of nineteen centuries of Christian effort. Nay, further, a Church divorced from the practical activities of life could never be even an effective preaching institution. You cannot in this way separate practice from theory. A theology that is not continually

revivifying itself by a close practical contact with life in all its multitudinous phases would soon melt away into the impalpable ether of fine-drawn metaphysical speculation, and would be shouldered out of being by the thronging actualities of the complex duties and pressing difficulties of our daily existence.

The Church must be ever in the thick of the fight, but she must function along the lines of her inherent nature and in accordance with her fundamental principles. This does not mean that her task will be a simple one, or that it will be always easy to determine in any particular difficulty that arises what her duty is. The Church never had greater problems to solve than those with which she is confronted to-day. Never was there a greater call for clear spiritual insight, for wise statesmanship, for power to discern the true point of attack against the social evils that are threatening the stability of our modern civilisation. And yet never was the call more imperative. If the Church to-day cannot re-assert her old supremacy as a civilising agent, then the case against her will go by default and she must submit to a long period of impotence in human affairs.

Now, there are two problems at the present

time that are absorbing the attention of all true statesmen and philanthropists. These are (1) the education of the young, and (2) the protection of the weak, physically, economically, or morally—*i.e.*, the care of the defective, the dependent, and the delinquent classes. These two problems lie at the very root of the welfare of the body politic. And the striking thing about them is that up to within quite recent years they have been regarded as peculiarly within the sphere of the Church's activity, while it is the characteristic of modern times that they are now the chief problems of the State.

As such they must remain. These are national problems, and a nation is not now in religion a homogeneous unity. We cannot forget, however, that the Church has a great record in both of these departments of human activity; has produced as profound thinkers and eminent scholars as are ever likely to appear under a different system; has, in Scotland, at least, educated a nation that led the van of human thought, and has formed the character of a prudent and thrifty race that feared the taint of pauperism as a disease.\* But times have changed. The diversity of religious ideas

\* See Note M, "What Scotland owes to the Church."

in every European nation, the growth of secularism, the mingling of races, have made it imperative that, for all public purposes where unity of administration is required, the State and not the Church must be the centre of authority.

We have now had a fairly long experience of national education conducted by the State. It has not been conspicuously successful. We are still, after a long period of experiment, in the throes of Education Acts, and those who have to do with the rising generation are frequently loud in their complaints that our boys and girls are not as efficiently trained in those branches that are to fit them for the duties of industrial life as one would have expected from the amount of thought, labour, and money expended on the task. But there is a still deeper complaint. The ethical training of the children is defective. A generation is rising up with little reverence for great ideals, with no strong sense of duty, no deep-seated regard for moral principle. Parental control is lessened. In the lower ranks, roughness, want of discipline, hooliganism, are on the increase. Juvenile crime is advancing in every country in Europe \*

\* See Morrison's "Juvenile Crime," and "Moral Instruction and Training in Schools : Report of an International Inquiry."



with rapid strides, in spite of all measures, coercive and philanthropic, that are taken to stem it. In other classes of society the same laxness of moral tone is evident. The pursuit of pleasure is with many the great aim of life. There is a lack of civic spirit among those who ought to be born into it, and civic offices are not sought by men who through education and opportunity ought to be best fitted to hold them.

That the failure of our educational methods to produce the best results is causing serious concern to the thoughtful is clearly evidenced by the quickening of interest in the ethical training of the young. More and more is it being realised that education must have an ethical basis if it is to produce men and women who will carry on the best traditions of the human race and consciously advance the upward movement of civilisation. The two large volumes on "Moral Instruction and Training in Schools," published by the strong Commission which made an exhaustive international inquiry into the subject, furnish food for serious thought. And the International Conference held recently in the University of London is a further significant sign of the times. Two facts stand out clear enough as a result of the

focussing of intelligent opinion on the matter. The first is that ethical instruction and training is an integral part of a sound education, And the second is that men are divided into two camps as to how that instruction and training can best be conveyed. It is well we should clearly understand where we stand on this matter and what are the issues at stake. That can only be done by taking a wide survey of the field and by coming in contact with minds that clearly grasp their own position and are prepared to follow their principles to their logical results. When we do so we find that the problem of religious teaching in schools is not a mere petty squabbling of rival sects to have their peculiar ecclesiastical and theological ideas instilled into the children, so as to secure the predominance of their own faction, but is at bottom the clash of irreconcilable ideals as to the whole aim and scope of the educational process.

Now, the Church has her own theory of education, which she must assert, maintain, and fight for to the end. The Church holds that the Christian theory of life lies at the basis of all right living ; that education is the development of the whole man in all the complexity of his powers ; that this development, if it is to secure

that harmony which will make life a unity, must be ethical throughout; that the special ethos which is to be cultivated is that of which the Cross is the symbol and the Christian Creed the intellectual postulate. This aim is not to be effected merely by setting apart a portion of the school-day for instruction in Scripture history or in Christian doctrine. Religious training is an influence that must permeate the whole system of education from bottom to top. It is a continual working towards Christian ideals, a daily appeal to Christian sanctions. Not that these ideals and sanctions are always to be consciously or ever obtrusively set forth, but that they are to be the implicit standards by which life values are to be judged and intellectual acquirements directed to practical uses.

Opposed to this theory is the idea that ethics and religion have no necessary connection. Ethical instruction must be conveyed on a strictly non-theological basis. It is not merely that the diversity of religious opinions in a nation makes this necessary in all schools of a public character, but in itself it is highly desirable. To indoctrinate children with religious dogmas is merely to confuse the infant mind with metaphysical subtleties that obscure practical moral issues. Let the primary moral

distinctions and the virtues and graces of life be taught to the children in school by precept and example, and leave it to the parents to give them what religious or non-religious direction they may see fit.

Now, it must be confessed that any reaction against religious teaching in schools has some basis in reason. Religious instruction has not always been wisely given. To store the mind of the growing boy or girl with an elaborate compendium of Calvinistic or any other theology, as has been done in the past, is not sound religious training. No doubt this method did not do so much harm as is often supposed, and in very many cases produced excellent results. The reason is simple enough. The compendium was universally accepted in the child's environments as a true theory of the universe. The child absorbed only so much of it as his moral and intellectual digestion could assimilate, and the rest glided harmlessly from the soul. The important point is that it did not bring the child into dissonance with his environments. It did not raise within his mind unanswerable questions or introduce him into a realm of controversy calculated to shake the foundations of his religious belief. We must now, however, recognise that the intellectual atmosphere has

changed, and that the methods of past generations will not suit the present emergency. To attempt to teach a system that cannot be taught whole-heartedly and with a distinct appreciation of its details, is to put ourselves out of the trend of the best modern educational methods and can result only in failure. Religious training does not mean a rigorous grounding in points of controversial divinity.

In religious teaching our methods must be as well thought-out and scientific as in any other aspect of education. Religion must come to the child as it came to the race. The Christian revelation must appeal to the soul as it did in the history of the infant Church. At a very early stage of his development the child realises that his outstretched arm cannot grasp the moon. He cries bitterly at the consciousness of his own impotence. The awe and wonder of the universe have fallen upon him, and when he is told of God, God is as real and concrete a Personality as his own mother. Moreover, the relation that subsists between him and God does not come to him as a metaphysical subtlety. It comes to him as a story—a true story, the various incidents of which rise concretely before his mind. The story is told by those who believe it, by those who are conscious of its

truth. It becomes an integral part of his essential being, it covers his whole outlook upon the universe. As intelligence grows and the moral sense develops, the implications of the story of Jesus unfold themselves, the vague instinctive distinction between right and wrong is filled with definite content, the Gospel ethos becomes an outward standard and an inner compulsion, unfolding in the child that implicit ideal of his life with which, in a purposeful world, he has been created. But the ethos is inseparably entwined round its sanction. His innate rationality responds to it. If he has been thus made, and his relation to the Eternal Father is as he has been taught, then there is a life he ought to live, and if he refuses to live it he is a rebel against his Maker, he is an undutiful son, he is defeating the purpose of his existence.

Now, any attempt at a non-theological treatment of ethics to a child who has been thus religiously trained must introduce into the child's mind that very confusion which the non-theological instructor deprecates. His teacher changes the sanction to the personal, or the civic, for a mere list of unconnected duties without any sanction is meaningless. All true teaching is simply answering the child's

questions, telling him the "why" of things. If the personal or civic sanction grows out of the religious sanction, all is well. Our teaching is rooted in reality. We are merely showing the child that what Jesus has told him to do is in accordance with the nature of things and corresponds with the facts of life. But in a non-theological system, if it is to satisfy all parties having an interest, the theological sanction must be superseded. The non-religious parent will not allow the teacher to appeal to the Cross, if by the Cross is meant what the religiously instructed child has in his mind, while the religious parent will, distinctly and properly, put his veto on any ethical teaching that would make Jesus only one of the martyrs of humanity. The ethical teacher, then, in any school where Christian theology is not allowed to enter, must discard the Christian religion altogether. He cannot teach the Christian ethos, which is saturated with theology. His ethos must either be of the most conventional type or must spring from some naturalistic sanction which may lead far away from the ethos of the Gospel.\*

Now, this is just what the Church, if she is to be true to her mission, cannot permit. She

\* The experience of France is instructive on this point.

must retain her hold upon the education of the young. And no one who watches the signs of the times can question that in the near future she will have to fight very hard for her inherent rights. The varieties of religious opinion among men, the perpetual rivalries and disputes among Christian sects on this matter of education, and the indifference of large numbers of lukewarm Christian people to the true inwardness of the issue at stake, are strengthening the hands of an already strong party, who demand that all national education shall be secular. No Churchman who understands his position can contemplate such a result with complacency. Even in the interests of education, in the lower sense of the term, it would be disastrous. For it can scarcely be doubted that a wise religious teaching forms a basis of culture and conscientiousness peculiarly favourable to the training of faculty and the acquisition of knowledge.

Here, then, is the sphere and the opportunity of the Church. Let me be clearly understood. The Church is not called merely to make continual futile efforts to maintain the *status quo*, to stem the flowing tide, and to sink into complacent acquiescence when she is submerged. The Church must rise to the idea that we are



at a critical period in the history of education, and must do her thinking on the same high level as those educational experts who are confronting the present situation. It is the conception of the meaning of education that is just now in the melting-pot. The whole problem is being discussed with the keenest interest and the most marked ability. Old methods of stimulating faculty, inculcating principles, inspiring energy, and acquiring knowledge are being discarded for new. The physical basis of intelligence is the subject of much anxious thought, and the hygienic development of the child is recognised as falling within the educational sphere. The ethical element is admitted to be indispensable. And in the general reconstruction of our educational system the Church must see that she is in no wise left out. Her interest in the question is paramount, for it is inherent in her Creed and constitution that she alone can train the human organism along the lines that develop the perfect man. The problem before her, no doubt, is a difficult one, for in the complexity of modern affairs she must secure a right co-ordination of all her forces and determine the relation that is to subsist between Church and school. It is for this

reason that the call for union is growing every day more imperative. It is simply disastrous that the all-important subject of the religious and moral training of the young in our national schools should be matter of acrimonious discussion and fierce partisan rivalry. All who believe in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion, and who hold, moreover, that the teaching of ethics can never be divorced from religion, and that no teaching that is not truly ethical is worth the name, should unite as one man to settle the lines along which that teaching is to be conveyed, to determine the methods by which it is to be imparted, and to secure for their own children that large, sane development of body, soul, and spirit which is the Christian ideal. I am far from undervaluing the great work the Church is actually doing in all her branches for the religious teaching of children. But who that knows the amount of thought and energy and money that is being expended on every other aspect of the educational problem will venture to say that we are tackling our part of it with sufficient seriousness or with a full realisation of its importance?

The relation of the Church to the vast chronic mass of dire poverty that disgraces our civilisa-

tion, to the multitudes who are either trembling on the verge of the poverty line or sinking below it to swell the rising ferment of paupers, incapables, and criminals, is a problem of great complexity which the Church must resolutely face. I am fully aware of the marvellous quickening of the conscience of the Church within recent years as to her direct responsibility for the terrible evils of chronic poverty and the degradation of slumdom. I speak not from the outside, but from the inside of the problem, and with an intimate knowledge of all the various agencies that are zealously working in this field. And it is from a large experience that I deliberately record my conviction that the problem is insoluble by State action alone, and that it is equally insoluble by the haphazard methods and ignorant enthusiasms of the rival philanthropic and ecclesiastical associations that are at present devoting so much energy and self-denying labours to remove this incubus from the national conscience.

It is an ethical problem and can, therefore, only be solved by the Church. I do not mean by the Church as we know it to-day—a number of warring sects, each striving for its own ascendancy and for the humiliation of its rivals.

I mean a Church as we might well have it, based on a definite creed which safeguards the fundamental ideas of Christendom, but allows a large toleration for differences of religious temperament and a wide elasticity as to practical methods. Only by such a Church could the necessary unity of action be secured and a complex, but thoroughly organised machinery be elaborated.

It is not an ethical problem alone. It is an economic problem. This is an admission of the first importance made by the social experts who are responsible for the Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. Destitution is not always the fault even of an able-bodied workman. It is not always possible for the man who is able and willing to work to secure employment. It ought to be. Leaving all theories out of account as to the limitations under which the right to work is to be admitted, the abstract principle is part of our religious faith. If he that will not work is not to be permitted to eat, a Christian State must furnish to every man the means of vindicating his existence and his manhood.

Because the problem is both ethical and economic we can only approach its solution through the harmonious co-working of Church

and State. It is for the State wisely to remove all insurmountable obstacles that hinder the development of the individual and to free the field from the intractable material with which the Church by her ethical methods finds it impossible to deal. In other words, wherever the element of compulsion is required in dealing with men the State finds its natural sphere. Where it is necessary to enforce an ethical standard in economic or industrial methods corresponding to the general conscience of the nation, the State steps in and by legislation brings the laggards up to the line. Or where, again, it is needful for the common good to deprive certain individuals of the liberty of preying upon society, the State asserts its function. But when the task is to deliver men from the tyranny of sin, from the enslavement of an evil will, to ethicise them up to their opportunities and possibilities of right action, this can only be done by the exercise of that spiritual power of which the Church is or ought to be the custodian.

The admitted failure of our Poor Law system is the result of the lack of a clear perception of the ethical and economic principles involved in the problem. That system is based on sound theoretic economic reasoning. It goes upon the

principle that you must not make the condition of the recipient of relief more favourable than that of the lowest and worst paid independent worker. It is frankly recognised that if you do, then you will have the whole body of the labouring class upon the rates, and a burden laid upon the nation it would be impossible to bear. It is to be noticed that the recipient of relief is here treated as a *thing*—a will-less creature—without the slightest spark of ambition to rise above the mere maintenance of existence upon the lowest possible terms. He is impinged upon merely by natural forces. The element of charity—even of assistance—is wholly eliminated. Public relief is so surrounded with deterrents that only the starving can storm its citadel.

Still, the principle might have effected something in squeezing up a desperate energy to maintain one's independence rather than accept help on humiliating conditions, had it been possible accurately to apply it. But as the worst-paid labour is already down to a mere subsistence wage, or even lower, you cannot reduce the pauper further without sending him out of existence altogether. When you really take him in hand and feed him up to a standard that will satisfy medical require-

ments, you find you are maintaining him at a rate higher than the average wage of a labourer can afford for the maintenance of himself, his wife, and family. If, then, the standard of maintenance be that of physical efficiency, there are far more possible applicants for poor relief than are or can be relieved. As it is only something below the worst paid labourer the relief is never efficient, except in cases where daily contact and medical supervision secure a higher level. Poor relief, therefore, becomes a dole to be supplemented from the outside, to be fought for, by the surging mass of destitute, vicious, and degraded creatures who form the residuum of our population, in a dreary struggle whose tendency is to deteriorate all who have to engage in it and to make it extremely difficult for those who are legitimate objects of State relief to receive the consideration that is their due.

Thus the Poor Law never really did tackle the problem of poverty. By making destitution the condition of relief, it was precluded from assisting those who are merely drifting to destitution and who by wise and timely assistance could be prevented from sinking to this last extreme. This phase of poverty has always been left for voluntary charity to aid,

Now, the Poor Law had at least one merit. It had distinctive principles which it sought to carry out. It was alive to the economic disturbance that might be caused by a lavish and indiscriminate subsidy to those who depended for their maintenance on the lowest form of manual labour. But voluntary charity was purely emotional. The heart was melted at the sight of misery and poured forth its largesse without thinking what the after-results would be. And, further, the State having taken over the care of the destitute, the national conscience was so far soothed that the best minds in the Church deemed it no longer necessary to give that close and accurate attention to the economics of charity which, in other circumstances, would have been forced upon them. The prevalent idea in the minds of most men up till quite recently was that our Poor Law system was dealing with poverty in a quite effectual manner, and that any decrease in the statistics of pauperism was a sign of increasing prosperity among the class from which paupers were recruited. No doubt charity was needed to supplement the work of regular relief, to provide additional comforts for deserving cases, and to tide those over temporary difficulties who



needed an assistance that could not come from the rates. And the charity was always forthcoming. Every Church had its system of doles. New institutions rose to administer charitable funds. New methods of relieving poverty found ardent supporters. Large legacies were left by pious and philanthropic individuals for special classes in whose straitened circumstances they were interested. All the poorer districts in our great cities were covered with a perfect network of religious and charitable agencies, whose workers were tireless in their efforts to stem the still flowing tide of poverty and degradation.

And yet a still flowing tide it is. This vast mass of degraded life is still with us. The weary struggle for bread goes on as before. The impression made upon the loathsome abodes of poverty, squalor, drunkenness, and vice seems scarcely visible to the ordinary vision. I would not be understood to say that the vast amount of Christian love and energy that have been devoted to the problems of slumdom have been wasted, or that the money spent in charity has not, in many individual cases, produced an amelioration of the conditions of life among the poor. Far from it. No one who has worked among the very poor

has failed of his reward in seeing sad lives brightened, evildoers turned from the ways of sin, children rescued from degrading environments, and in securing a personal loyalty and gratitude far beyond anything his labours have merited. Nay, further, it is largely through the efforts of the devoted men and women of high moral tone and intellectual calibre who, in recent years, have given their lives to the service of the poor that their cause is winning that recognition and support which is full of hope for the future. But, making all allowances, when we look at the problem in the mass and think of the huddled misery of our congested areas, we must admit that all that has yet been done has been merely to gain some understanding of the facts and also of the methods through which the problem will *never* be solved.

The economic method has failed completely. You cannot abolish poverty by simply making it a degrading thing to accept public relief, and forcing men, in order to retain their self-respect, to put forth all their energy to secure an independent existence.

The method of voluntary charity has failed quite as conspicuously. You cannot cure the evils of poverty by pious and well-meant

platitudes, and by letting loose upon an already demoralised population a number of well-intentioned philanthropists and religious enthusiasts to stop the gaping wounds of the social system by a steady flow of gold.

If any real, permanent good is to be effected, the two forces—religious and economic—must work together in the most perfect harmony. Church and State must effectually combine and must be perfectly sure of each other's sphere. It is for the Church to bring to bear upon the individual a steady pressure of moral influence that will enable him to make the very best of his position, that will force him to an assertion of his manhood by an inner and not an outer compulsion. So long as the problem is ethical the Church must take it up. In the struggle of the individual to maintain a sound economic footing in the industrial sphere, or to regain this footing when it has been lost, the Church must step in with continual sympathy, with an ever ready and gracious help. The saddest feature of our modern religious life is that it is just here the Church most conspicuously fails—that it is doing least for those who, in unto-ward circumstances, are doing their very best for themselves, that it is undoubtedly most in

evidence among the moderately well-to-do, and in its futile missions among the very poor. It is not only that the Church should help the struggling poor by sympathy and advice, and by bringing them under a spiritual influence that will idealise their lives and inspire their hearts with courage, but all agencies and institutions that are of a preventive, restorative, or remedial nature should be part of the Church's organisation. Wherever the appeal is to a man's higher nature and to that alone, it is the voice of Jesus that is to be heard; and whatever institutions are purely and directly the outcome of the religious spirit can only attain to their full efficiency if they are under the control of that divine instrument which He has ordained for the world's salvation. If this were so, the Church would be continually face to face with her real work, and would be forced to study those social environments which determine the influences that so largely mould character and ennoble or deteriorate the spiritual life. Her students, passing through such an economic and psychological discipline, would approach the problem of theology from within and make it once more a living science.

And the State comes in either where legis-

lation is required to ease the pressure of hard economic forces or to detain by compulsion those who will not submit to any remedial process. We are far from the days when economic tendencies were supposed to be beneficent natural laws, which, if only acquiesced in, would work out a material terrestrial paradise. We recognise now that they are often baneful forces, springing from the natural selfishness of the human heart, whose evil effects it is the duty of a wise statesmanship to counteract. But they can only be counteracted by understanding them, and setting into operation other forces which will track them to their subtlest lair and by a natural process destroy their power to hurt. The legislation of past years has been very largely destructive. It has been engaged in removing old restraints, many of them useful in their day and generation, which had become too narrow to confine the full-throbbing vitality of a new era. Legislation is becoming more and more constructive, building up a new fabric of society which shall correspond to modern needs. We look to the State now for enactments that shall soften the struggle for bare existence, shall give the soul room to breathe, and space for

the Church to exercise its idealising force. We look to the State to reduce temptations to drunkenness and vice, which is all it ever can do, for only the Church can attack at its source the corrupt human heart from which these evils spring. We look to the State to exercise a wise compulsion in restraining those whose liberty is lawlessness and putting them under a rational discipline which will make their lives not wholly useless and corrupting. We look to the State to decree righteousness and execute justice, to secure for each his own, to furnish a broad, unhampered field for the growth of the virtues and graces of human life.

Such, then, are the respective spheres of Church and State in the pressing social problems of the present hour. The Church is living in a critical time and has before her a complex and difficult task. Will she recognise the day of her visitation, rise, as she has done before, in her God-given strength and prove her adequacy for the burden God has laid upon her? Undoubtedly the signs are hopeful, but only the future can tell whether she has grasped the true nature of her problem.

## NOTES





## NOTES

### NOTE A

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#### THE INTUITION OF GOD

I HOLD with Schleiermacher that "if man does not become one with the Eternal in the immediate unity of his intuitive feelings, he remains for ever separated from it in the derived unity of consciousness." Professor Flint's "Theism" is the ablest modern statement of the theistic argument on the old scholastic lines. He repudiates the idea of intuition being the source of our knowledge of God, and seems to hold that a true knowledge of God can only be reached by a consideration of the cumulative effect of the arguments adduced in favour of the divine existence. But Professor Flint cannot maintain that no man can rationally believe in God till he has mastered the contents of his Theism. Nor does he. "The great idea of God—the most sublime and important of all ideas—has come to us in a wondrous manner through the minds and hearts of countless generations which it has exercised and sustained, which it has guided in

darkness, strengthened in danger, and consoled in affliction." The idea of God comes therefore to the soul, and is accepted by the soul, before argument is ever thought of. It is accepted unquestioningly and is lived through empirically. It is even in its dim dawning an immediate apprehension, a revelation, the content of which is enlarged by contact with other souls and by the record of the experiences of great religious natures. An argument whose conclusion comes before its premisses is a somewhat singular one. The place of argument here is not to prove the objective reality of God, but to vindicate the rationality of our immediate apprehension of Him. The theistic argument is quite sufficient to demonstrate that the conception of God is a profoundly rational one, but it can never advance from the rational to the real. The idea of God comes first in the immediacy of the soul's unity with the Eternal, which gives it a reality as undoubted as that of the Ego itself. It is the province of reasoning to evolve the content of this conception.

## NOTE B

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### THE CUMULATIVE ARGUMENT

It is maintained that though no single line of argumentation can absolutely prove the existence of God, yet the effect of all the various arguments converging to the same point is to reach a conclusion that ought to be practically convincing to every rational

mind. But this line of reasoning overlooks a peculiarity in the theistic proof. Pascal long ago pointed out that "All the principles of sceptics, stoics, and atheists are true, but their conclusions are false, because the opposite principles are also true." We simply land ourselves in unresolvable antinomies when we attempt to reach transcendental conclusions by merely rationalistic processes. The cumulative argument works both ways. If you marshal all the considerations that make it extremely probable that the universe is the creation of a self-existing Being who thinks, and feels, and wills, you undoubtedly present a strong case. But if, on the other hand, you elaborate the evidence that tells against this position, your case is also very strong. You are on the horns of a dilemma from which there is no rational escape. The religious man makes what Newman calls the "venture of faith." He takes the risk of believing, just as the sceptic takes the risk of disbelieving. But to the innate rationality of the human mind this is always a most unsatisfactory position. When we frankly recognise that God is a conception given in consciousness, however rudimentary the conception may be, then the weight of the scale is thrown so decidedly on the one side that we cannot evade the result. Neither in doing so are we acting irrationally. We are only doing what in all other departments of life and thought we cannot help doing—making our most deeply rooted instincts the starting-point for life's activity. By intuition in this connection is not meant a mere feeling that has no intellectual element in it. Intuition of the Infinite and Eternal is an intellectual act, but it is the intellectual act by which we appre-

hend axioms, not the syllogistic process by which we reason from them.

## NOTE C

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## “GOD IN THE MAKING”

Ingersoll's flippant parody on Pope and Burns, “An honest God's the noblest work of man,” puts this theory tersely. It will not bear thinking out. It may as well be said that the scientific knowledge of men in its gradual development has created the marvellous forces of nature, as that the evolution of the religious consciousness has created God. Knowledge can only be of what is. Knowledge and reality are not advancing *pari passu*.

## NOTE D

(Page 55)

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

This is the theory of the Catholic Church maintained by the best theologians of the Church of Rome. “Lastly comes the Authority of the Christian Church, which, resting upon the revelations of conscience and its development by Christ, may fairly be held to embody the highest spiritual perceptions known to

man. And not only so, but it is the custodian of the conceptions elaborated by Christian theologians from conscience and revelation. Thus it contains at once the highest intuitions and the most comprehensive conceptions of Christendom, while the blending of spiritual perception and rational analysis is secured by the rulers who preserve the organic unity of the Church, protect the revelation from rationalistic assaults, and seek to keep theology spiritual as well as rational."—See "The Philosophical Basis of Religion," by John Watson, LL.D., p. 27.

## NOTE E

(*Page 81*)

## HARNACK AND THE ABBÉ LOISY

The criticism of Harnack's "Wesen des Christenthums" by the Abbé Loisy in his "Gospel and the Church" is incisive and convincing. Harnack's method is fundamentally wrong. If we wish truly to understand Jesus, it will not do to consider merely what He thought of Himself or to detach His sayings from their effect upon His environment. It is of even more importance to consider what His disciples thought of Him, what the whole result of His Personality was upon the generation to which He appealed. The Abbé Loisy says, "Herr Harnack does not conceive Christianity as a seed, at first a plant in potentiality, then a real plant, identical from the beginning of its evolution to the final limit and from the root to the

summit of the stem, but as a fruit, ripe, or rather over-ripe, that must be peeled to reach the incorruptible kernel, and Herr Harnack peels his fruit with such perseverance, that the question rises if anything will remain at the end. This method of dismembering a subject does not belong to history, which is a science of observation of the living, not of dissection of the dead. Historical analysis notices and distinguishes, it does not destroy what it touches, nor think all movement digression, and all growth deformity." \* Contrast with this Harnack's own words: "The conservative position of Jesus towards the religious traditions of His people had the necessary result, that His preaching and His Person were placed by believers in the framework of this tradition, which was thereby very soon greatly expanded. But though this way of understanding the Gospel was certainly at first the only possible way, and though the Gospel itself could only be preserved by such means, yet it cannot be mistaken that a displacement in the conception of the Person and preaching of Jesus, and a burdening of religious faith, could not but forthwith set in, from which developments followed, the premisses of which would be vainly sought for in the words of the Lord." † If we translate this into simple language, it means that the Christian religion survived because the disciples of Jesus misunderstood Him from the beginning. Nay, further, this is the only possible way in which it could have survived. The stem and fruit of the plant have no relation to the seed. If we wish to understand

\* "The Gospel and the Church," p. 19.

† Harnack, "History of Dogma," vol. i., p. 73. (Theological Translation Library.)

what the seed contained, the best way is to dig down to the roots and try to reconstruct it from the decaying and useless matter it has thrown off. Surely this is a curiously unscientific method of studying vital historical movements. O Science, what illogicalities have been committed in thy name !

## NOTE F

(*Page 85*)

## THE VALUE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The totality of spiritual experience is not gained by a numerical reckoning of the adherents of any special faith. From the point of view indicated in these pages quality is of much more importance than quantity in determining the nature of the objective reality to which spiritual experience testifies. I am obliged to take for granted that Christian experience in its profoundest and most characteristic phases is the experience most in consonance with the spiritual constitution of the universe. I am forced to do so because, living under Christian influences, I must make Christian experience my starting-point. But the fact that Jesus is accorded a clear pre-eminence as a spiritual teacher by so wide a range of concurrent testimony strengthens my belief that I am on the right lines in making Him the norm by which to judge of other teachers and to test the experience of those who have not fallen under His direct personal influence.

## NOTE G

(Page 96)

## PROFESSOR JAMES

Professor James does not take us any further. He sees very clearly that it is only the positive religious belief that produces religious phenomena. Commenting on the words from a religious paper—"Perhaps the best thing we can say of God is that He is the inevitable inference"—he says very truly, "Would martyrs have sung in the flames for a mere inference, however inevitable it might be?" Yet, summing up the results of his induction from the widest possible range of religious experiences, all he can say is this:—"Disregarding the overbeliefs, and confining ourselves to what is common and generic, we have *in the fact that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come*, a positive content of religious experience which, it seems to me, *is literally and objectively true as far as it goes.*" This is a very large admission, and a scientific analysis of it is bound to lead us very far. It is simply incomprehensible that, as the phenomena of religious experience are only produced by definite and concrete religious beliefs, it should be for ever impossible to get any more than the very vaguest knowledge of the super-sensible Reality. Granted that spiritual truth may often be clothed with material illusion, that form of truth which produces the highest and most ideal life



must in its concreteness be nearest to the Absolute Truth.

## NOTE H

(*Page 135*)

## WESTMINSTER CONFESSION ON THE CHURCH

The Westminster Confession of Faith maintains the doctrine of a Visible Catholic Church, but its definition is so loose as to make it of little practical value. "The Visible Church, which is also Catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the Law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." If we take "the true religion" to mean the Confession of Faith and the Presbyterian polity, this definition is certainly narrow and definite enough, and probably in this sense it was originally intended. But the impossibility of holding such a doctrine has resulted, in those modern Churches that still maintain the Confession as their Creed, in a gradual falling away from the Church ideal and resting upon the conception of an Invisible Church—a conception which, in its larger sense, is common to all Christian Churches.

## NOTE I

*(Page 179)*

## THE RELATION BETWEEN ETHICS AND DOGMATICS

No doubt there is no fundamental difference between the position of Newman Smyth and that here maintained. It is a difference of emphasis. "In the Gospels we observe that the teaching of Jesus is ethical and religious rather than metaphysical and theological. His teaching involves, it is true, a divine metaphysics, but it is directly ethical and religious rather than theological or systematic. Dogmas may logically be derived from many of Jesus's words ; but immediately, as He spake them, they were spirit and they were life. . . . It is to be noticed that the more distinctively theological truths, such as the Lord's unique relation to the Father, and man's relations to God and knowledge of Him, are approached in Jesus' teaching on the moral rather than the metaphysical side, are expressed in the language of moral experience and measured in terms of ethical value." Through all this method of treating the subject there is an implicit idea that you can approach the metaphysic of Christianity otherwise than through the moral element, that the two parts of Christian teaching can be disjoined. It is this divorce between dogmatics and ethics that has proved disastrous to the former and has weakened the sanction of the latter. It has begotten in the minds of many Christian people an idea that belief is a matter of little consequence in the formation of character, that religious belief and right conduct have no neces-

sary connection. And it has further weakened the intellectual hold of many upon Christian doctrine by failing to present to them sufficiently strongly the ethical value of Christian conceptions.

## NOTE J

(*Page 180*)

## HEDONISM

It is impossible to put it more clearly and tersely than in the immortal lines of Burns :—

Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,  
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious !

For the moment the “*summum bonum*” was his. He had overcome the world. He had reached the apex of existence.

## NOTE K

(*Page 243*)

## THE CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

“No inquiry into the economical history of England would be complete which did not give some account of the clergy. During a long time they were the most powerful factors in the progress of civilisation, were the principal instruments by which the very memory of ancient literature was preserved, and some of its

relics treasured ; were the only historians of the age, the only educators of the people, the only refuge from tyranny and violence, the asylum of the past, the hope of the future. At one time the national and secular clergy performed, to the best of their power, these high functions ; at another time, the protection of society becomes the business of monasteries, though often unconsciously ; at another, the Papacy is the ark of refuge ; at another, the hierarchy of different European States was compelled to save the Corporate Church from the ambition, the vices, the incapacity of its chief ; at another, the authors of schisms within the order were the agents in working out the higher destinies of mankind. As they preserved the relics of culture, of order, of law, of obedience to a common purpose ; as they maintained a bold front against the degrading and debasing selfishness of a turbulent aristocracy, the common foe of the administration, of trade, of religion, of morality, of every national and every private interest, so they were the principal cause why England became thoroughly settled and occupied, that agriculture was safely and, for the times, successfully carried on, and that the husbandman was not utterly trodden down and impoverished.”—Thorold Rogers, “Six Centuries of Work and Wages,” chap. xiii. Thorold Rogers has no particular bias in favour of the clergy, and in many cases is distinctly unfair to the Church, but the statements he makes here are incontrovertible. The Church was the soul of feudalism, which, apart from her influence tended to become an insupportable tyranny. The work of the Church in mediæval times was to enforce the responsibility of power, and in her best days she succeeded fairly well.

## NOTE L

*(Page 253)*

## THE FRANCISCANS

“The Franciscan is the missionary of the town ; he has nothing whatever to do with the country. He belongs to the rising community of the town. He is their representative in many particulars as well as their teacher. Like them he assumes different characters ; he appears under different forms, unlike the monk, who is stable and uniform. If he departs from the primitive institution of his founder it is so because he is raised with the population among whom his lot is cast. With their wealth he must in some measure grow wealthy also. Still he is the poor missionary preaching to the poor, dependent entirely upon their sympathies, disappearing when those sympathies are withdrawn. Never a landowner, never so far removed from his primitive condition as to cease to be a mendicant. Out of this dependence sprung his strength and his errors. He is the genuine product of the voluntary system.”—“*Monumenta Franciscana*” (Rolls Series), edited by J. G. Brewer, M.A., vol. i., p. xix.

## NOTE M

*(Page 279)*

## WHAT SCOTLAND OWES TO THE CHURCH

There is nothing more striking than to contrast the state of Scotland at the time of the Union of the Parlia-

ments in 1707 and its condition in the latter part of the century, and to trace the forces that were at work producing the marvellous change. So far as the material condition of the people was concerned, Fletcher of Saltoun considered that the best thing that could be done for two hundred thousand out of a population of less than a million would be to reduce them to slavery, as only thus could they be reclaimed from a condition of primitive savagery and maintained at a standard of physical efficiency. Even among the rest of the people the poverty was appalling. The country had emerged from a century and a half of incessant strife and misgovernment and was bleeding at every pore. The intellectual barrenness of the land was no less striking. For the first quarter of a century no name of outstanding merit can be mentioned. Not till Hume published his "Treatise on Human Nature" in 1739, which fell stillborn from the press, was there any sign that Scotland had not lost the capacity of producing men of original genius. With the middle of the century the change begins to be apparent. The forces initiated by the Revolution Settlement have begun to produce their natural effect, and Scotland, emerging from her temporary obscurity, is in the van of the nations. Agricultural improvements are transforming the whole face of the country and giving Scotland a pre-eminence in scientific agriculture she has not yet lost. Manufactures and commerce begin to flourish and wealth is increasing. The condition of the people steadily advances, though there is no compulsory Poor Law. In every department of thought and activity Scotsmen are gradually taking the lead. The brothers Hunter are revolutionising medicine.

James Watt is creating the modern world by applying steam as a motive force. Thomas Reid, following upon Hume, is laying the foundation of modern philosophy. Adam Smith is discovering the principles that determine the wealth of nations and marking an epoch in human development. On Principal Robertson falls the mantle of Herodotus and Thucydides, of Livy and Tacitus. Robert Burns produces those flawless gems of lyric poetry that place him in the front rank of the world's singers. Such a wonderful intellectual outburst could only spring from a nation that was intellectually intensely alive. And it must not be forgotten that during all this period the dominant influence in Scotland was ecclesiastical. According to Buckle, Scotland was, next to Spain, the most priest-ridden country in Europe. Education from top to bottom was in the hands of the Church, and the consequence was that every peasant was an educated man, capable of discussing the profoundest problems of philosophy and religion. The Church took care of the poor, aided in the cities by the pious benefactions of wealthy donors, and fulfilled the task so judiciously that, while there may have been much poverty, there was no pauperism. Dr. Chalmers has in these latter days received the recognition that was his due as a sociologist, but it must be remembered that he owed his position simply to the fact that he held fast by the old Scottish tradition and struggled for the old ideal of Churchmanship, which was fast disappearing in the clash of modern forces, whose meaning and tendency were in his day but imperfectly understood.





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